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SABINA ZEMBRA

SABINA ZEMBRA

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES

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SABINA ZEMBRA

CHAPTER I

SIR ANTHONY

On a certain Wednesday afternoon in March the billiard-room of the Waldegrave Club, Pall Mall, was the scene of a remarkable occurrence. The Waldegrave, it may be said parenthetically, is held in much veneration by our country cousins as the headquarters of a great political party; there the chiefs of that party are supposed to meet and direct the operations of a general election; thither impecunious candidates look for the sinews of war; and the honour of its membership is understood to be the crowning glory and reward of him who has wooed and won over to the cause a doubtful constituency. All this may be so, or it may not be so, but to the Londoner, and especially to the London diner-out, the Waldegrave is chiefly known for its noble hall and its stately galleries, its excellent cuisine and cellar, its pleasant outlook into Carlton Gardens, and the proportions and decoration of its library, which is far and away the

most beautiful room in Europe. As for the more modest apartment in which this remarkable occurrence took place, no visitor is allowed to enter within its door, which may account for the rumour that the proceedings there are not always conducted with a dignity and repose befitting the fame and name of so notable a club. Indeed it has been affirmed (but doubtless by political enemies) that the pool-players of the Waldegrave, safe in the friendly secrecy of that upper chamber, occasionally, and even frequently, break out into mild revelry; that derisive cheers overwhelm the 'sniggler;' that groans of execration bring the 'fluker' to open shame; and that the timid and nervous player is frightened out of his wits by a gentle remark that he has 'missed the ball!' However, these stories are probably not true; the rancour of party strife is capable of inventing anything; and it would be a pity if the constituencies were to believe that the Waldegrave is anything other than what it really is—that is to say, a great and decorous political institution.

On the afternoon in question, one of the members of the club went up to the billiard-room, opened the door, and went in, greeting pleasantly this one and the other of his acquaintances as he passed them. He was a tall man, of about sixty, handsome and well dressed, fresh-complexioned and white-haired, of debonair look and bland expression, and evidently very well pleased with himself. This was Sir Anthony Zembra, senior member for one of the big

manufacturing towns in the north; a man of enormous wealth; a writer of pamphlets on currency, free trade, and kindred questions; an active and industrious politician, who might fairly hope to be invited to join the Government, in a subordinate capacity, one of these days; and socially —well, socially, the most detested man in London. But how could he help that? No one could have explained why he was so detested; he himself did not know it; nay, it would have been impossible for him to grasp the idea. Rich, handsome, bland of manner; his wife a queen of fashion; his dinners quite famous for their excellence; how could he be detested? No, that was the last idea that could have gained admission into Sir Anthony Zembra's head.

'I will take a ball, marker,' he said; for they were just beginning a new game.

'Right, sir.'

The newcomer walked up to the little mahogany box and deposited the shilling claimed by the pool; then he proceeded to get down his cue from its tin case. The marker gave out the balls.

'Red on white—yellow's your player.' The game had begun.

'What ball am I, marker?'

'Blue, Sir Anthony; the ball is in the pocket.'

'Who plays on me?'

'Mr. Herschell,' said the marker, naming the notoriously best player in the club.

And now occurred the incident to which reference has been made.

'Oh, look here, that won't do at all,' exclaimed Sir Anthony. 'Why, I shan't have a chance. That won't do. Herschell, do you play on me? Well, I'm out; I'm not going to give you three lives for nothing.'

'You may withdraw your ball if you like, Sir Anthony,' observed the marker.

'Why, of course I do. Mr. Herschell's too good for me.'

'The blue ball is withdrawn,' the marker said, shutting up the three lives on the board; and then he was about to call the game when Sir Anthony interrupted him.

'Come along, marker, give me that shilling out.'

The marker seemed surprised, but he said quite respectfully, 'No, sir, you can't have the shilling out. You may withdraw your ball, but the shilling is in the pool; you can't have that back.'

'Oh, nonsense!' called out Sir Anthony, with a kind of stormy good nature. 'Nonsense! I haven't played. I'm not in the game. Do you think I'm going to let them play for my money? Come, out with that shilling!'

The marker was helpless; he could only look at the other members in an appealing sort of way. And they looked at each other; for nothing of the kind had happened in the club before—no, nor in any other club, most likely. Then came muttered protests, some angry, some half-ashamed.

'No, no; you can't have the shilling out—forfeited to the pool—you joined in the game when you took a ball—the rule of the game—the marker's quite right—you can't interfere with the pool.'

'Oh, but can't I?' he said, with a good-humoured laugh. 'Do you think I'm going to let you play for my money when I'm not in the game?—you thieves and robbers!'

And therewithal he jauntily went up to the mahogany box and took out the shilling and put it in his pocket. Then he proceeded to replace his cue in its case, and as he walked to the door he shook his forefinger in a waggish manner at the old gentleman whose superior skill had induced him to withdraw from the game.

'You old rascal,' he said playfully, 'you thought you were going to have an easy victim? No, no; not to-day, thank you.'

They made no reply, no protest; the magnificence of the man's meanness, and of his self-complacency, was too appalling; when he had shut the door a kind of awestruck silence fell over the room, and they looked at each other in dumb amazement.

'Green plays on yellow!' the marker called; and this awoke them from their trance; and then, as the game went on, there were questions asked as to the probable dimensions of Sir Anthony Zembra's fortune, and the bigger the figures the greater the disgust. But there was little said, for the marker was within hearing.

Meanwhile, Sir Anthony, suave, radiant, complaisant—and certainly little dreaming that he had just conferred a favour on some eight or ten of his fellow-creatures, in giving them something they could definitely produce as a reason for hating him—Sir Anthony, bland, smiling, and debonair, went down through the hall of the club. Perhaps the nod which he bestowed on his intimates had just a touch of patronage in it; but how could that very well be helped? His life had been all through so prosperous and successful and satisfactory. His first wife had died as soon as she grew middle-aged and plain; his second was good-tempered, except when he wanted the carriage in the afternoon; the *Times* printed his letters in leaded type; his digestion enabled him to eat even a House of Commons' dinner with equanimity; and his constituents believed him when he told lies about previous engagements. The old woman who sweeps the crossing at the corner of St. James's Square curtsied lower to him than to anybody else, though never a penny had he bestowed on her. In St. James's Street the cabmen had to look out for him, not he for them. He went out into the open thoroughfare with a charming nonchalance, glancing neither to the left nor to the right. And so, eventually, he made his way home, to a big house in Lancaster Gate; and he walked the whole distance, for Lady Zembra had possession of the carriage, and he did not care to spend money on a hansom. Besides, his appearance was much admired (and he knew

it) as he strode along Piccadilly and up through the Park.

He let himself in with a latch-key. The house was very quiet, insomuch that a faint murmur coming from the schoolroom was distinctly audible. And as the door of the room was open an inch or two, Sir Anthony thought he might as well pause there and discover whether the governess was doing her duty; for this was one of the afternoons on which nothing but French was allowed to be spoken; and it was Miss Renshaw's business to impose a fine of threepence for any lapse. However, everything seemed going on well. Master Reginald (his father could hear) was reading aloud a composition of his own. It was a description of the character and conduct of a dog belonging to a public-house in the Bayswater Road—'*Un gros chien qui appartient à une maison publique dans le Bayswater Road*,' was the youthful scholar's rendering, and apparently that animal had not found much favour in the eyes of the narrator. But presently other sounds smote the listener's ear. A squabble had arisen somewhere. '*Voyez, voyez, mademoiselle, il a fait pour mon dessin!*' '*Non, non—ce n'était pas moi—ne mentez vous pas—je vous donnerai—vous donnerai—une boite sur l'oreille!*' Sir Anthony thought this an opportune moment. He opened the door and entered, and there was instant silence. But he did not remonstrate or scold; it was enough that Miss Renshaw should see how his mere presence—

his presence, without a look or a word—could produce calm.

'Have you looked through to-day's newspapers yet, Miss Renshaw?' said he, as he strolled up to the chimney-piece and lifted therefrom a pass-book labelled on the outside—'Domestic.'

'Yes, Sir Anthony; except those that came this afternoon,' said the patient-looking, gray-faced young woman sitting there.

And of these desultory paragraphs that he was now scanning with much complacent interest, who could guess at the authorship? Perhaps the patient-eyed young person who had that morning carefully clipped them out of the various journals, and pasted them in the pass-book, had also herself inspired them, or even written them out, for the information of provincial editors? At all events, they showed a remarkable familiarity with the comings and goings of the Zembra family, and also a kind of pathetic assumption that these, and the smallest details about them, must be of keen interest to the British public. Here are some of them:

'Lady Zembra and Miss Florence Zembra will shortly leave Lancaster Gate on a visit to Lord and Lady Petersfield at their beautiful place near Marlow.'

'At the marriage of Miss Emily Vere and Colonel Langley last week, the costume of Master Reginald Zembra, who was dressed as a page of the time of Henry VIII.,

was much admired. The design of the costume, we understand, was presented to Lady Zembra by a distinguished Academician.'

'The Chapel Royal, St. James's, was on Sunday last crowded to excess to hear a sermon by the Bishop of Truro. Lady Zembra and her daughters were among the congregation.'

'At the Drawing-Room held by the Princess of Wales on Thursday, no costume was more remarked and admired than that of Lady Zembra. Her ladyship wore a train from the shoulder of crimson Lyons velvet, lined with pink merveilleux and trimmed with clusters of pink and crimson ostrich feathers, tied with ribbons of the same colour. Her bodice was of pink merv, over a petticoat of the same material, draped with embroidered *crêpe de Chine*, and finished at the bottom with handsome chenille fringe.'

'Sir Anthony and Lady Zembra and the Misses Florence and Gertrude Zembra were present at the lecture given by Dr. Felthurst on Wednesday at Princes Hall, Piccadilly. Her ladyship formed quite a distinct figure among the assembly, although merely unostentatiously occupying a seat with her husband and daughters in the body of the hall.'

But all these were as nothing to the description of a children's fancy-dress ball given the week before by a sister-in-law of Sir Anthony's, at which all the Zembra family (except one, whose acquaintance we shall make by and by) appeared to have been present; and very pretty and

nice were the things which the faithful chronicler had to say about every one of them. It must have been a gay scene, according to this flattering account; every one looked at his or her best; the costumes were charming; Lady Zembra was especially admired as Marie Antoinette; and Sir Anthony Zembra, as a courtier of the time of George II., was a most picturesque and striking figure. It was a great success in short; and never had the ballroom at the Red House, Campden Hill, presented so beautiful a sight as when the children were ranged in two long rows to dance 'Sir Roger de Coverley.'

Well, Sir Anthony was thus pleasantly engaged in studying the social impression produced by the various members of his family, when he was somewhat rudely interrupted. There was an unusual noise outside. Then the doors were flung wide open, and there entered hurriedly a tall young lady, who was very pale, but had sufficient firmness in the look of her clear-cut and beautiful face.

'Miss Renshaw,' said she quickly, 'will you take the children upstairs? I want this room. Take them to the night nursery.'

'What's this, now?' Sir Anthony said, at once startled and angry at the sudden interruption.

'There's a man hurt,' his daughter answered him quietly; but her fingers were quick enough in removing the things that lay strewn on a couch there. 'They're bringing him in.'

'What?' he exclaimed again, and still more angrily; but there was a shuffling of footsteps outside, and the immediate answer was the appearance of a number of men, who were slowly and with difficulty carrying an apparently inanimate body along the passage.

'Sabina, what is this? who is this?'

'I don't know, papa.'

She was busy with many things.

'Then what do you mean by bringing him in here? God bless my soul, what are you about? Send him to a hospital! I say he must go to a hospital. Here, my men, what are you doing? Who told you to bring the man in here? He must go to the hospital——'

'The young lady, sir,' one of the men said.

'Sabina, what is this?' her father again angrily demanded. 'I will have none of your Whitechapel nonsense here. Are you going to turn the house into a public shambles?'

But Sabina had made her preparations during these few seconds. She caught her father's arm for a moment with a gesture of entreaty.

'Papa, I cannot send him to a hospital. This is all my doing. I am to blame for the accident—and—and there is no time to be lost—why, common humanity——' She turned to the footman, who was standing helplessly by, 'Willis, run downstairs and fetch me a basin of water and a sponge and some cloths; and send for Doctor Hunger-

ford—no, Mr. Hungerford, I mean—the son—and tell him to come at once. And you—yes, bring him in now—but gently—gently—the head a little higher up—yes, that will do'—and when they had got him laid on the couch, she, with her own fingers, and swiftly and dexterously too, undid his necktie, and removed his collar, and opened his waistcoat: it was clear to the most ignorant of the bystanders that this young lady knew very well what she was about.

But as for Sir Anthony? Well, Sir Anthony stood looking on for a second or two very much exasperated. But what could he do? He could not summon a policeman and have the whole pack of them thrust into the street; it was his own daughter who had had the man brought in; and, moreover, she said she was responsible for the accident; and it would not look well to quarrel with her before these people. He wished the wounded man was at Jericho; but he did not want to have these rude folk stare at him for what they would doubtless consider his inhumanity. But he was very angry with his daughter; and then again, he did not like looking at a head and neck that were bedabbled with blood; and the doctor would have more unpleasant business when he arrived; so, on the whole, Sir Anthony thought he might as well retire from the scene, only he was growling and grumbling to himself as he passed upstairs about the midsummer madness of young women who nowadays went out and got themselves trained as nurses at the East London Hospital.

On the writing-desk of his study there was lying a pass-book labelled outside 'Political;' and apparently his private secretary had done for him what the governess did for Lady Zembra and the family. As he glanced over these paragraphs—'Sir Anthony Zembra, we understand, has consented to take the chair at the next meeting of the Statistical Society'—'Sir Anthony Zembra has given notice that on Thursday next he will ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department,' etc.—'Sir Anthony Zembra was present last evening at a dinner given at the official residence of the Prime Minister in Downing Street'—'We understand that it is the intention of Sir Anthony Zembra's constituency to entertain him at a public banquet in May next'—'The remarkable speech on the Land Question which Sir Anthony Zembra delivered in the House of Commons last week is, we understand, to be issued in the form of a pamphlet'——as he read these and many similar paragraphs, Sir Anthony's brow cleared, and his face resumed its ordinary pleasant and complacent expression, for he was glad to have his merits recognised, and he rather liked to contemplate himself in the mirror of the public press.

CHAPTER II

SABIE

Sabina Zembra—Sabie, her intimate friends called her; and they seemed rather proud of displaying this familiarity; indeed, many of the women-folk down Kensington way, if you mentioned the name of Miss Zembra, would say, with a kind of air of distinction, 'Oh, do you mean Sabie?' as if Sabie belonged to them and to them alone—— Sabina Zembra was a tall young woman and fair; of upright carriage and well-poised neck; with a clear, pale complexion, light brown eyes that were soft and benignant, and light brown hair that burned gold in the sun. She was twenty-five, though a dimple in her cheek when she laughed made her look younger, and hinted that she was light-hearted enough; on the other hand, her ordinary expression was of an almost maternal gentleness and generosity. The blandness that in her father was begotten of self-sufficiency, became in her the blandness of grave goodwill; she looked as if kindness was a natural instinct with her; as if she liked seeing the people around her being made happy. But even this cannot wholly explain the extraordinary affec-

tion that women seemed to have for this woman; they would cling around her when she entered a room and pet her with pretty names; and would send her flowers on any birthday or other excuse; and would treasure her letters, and show them, and say with a touch of pride: 'Oh, Sabie has just been writing; isn't she the dearest and sweetest girl in the world?' 'I hope Sabie will never marry,' was the constant cry of her chief companion and friend (who, poor lass, had not much in the way of pretty looks to boast of). 'Just think what her goodness, and her beauty, and her loving disposition mean to so many people; and think of her going and throwing all that away on a man!' Of course the men professed to laugh at this widespread and ridiculous infatuation; and declared that Miss Zembra was a woman's woman, and nothing more; but at the same time it was observed, on the rare occasions on which Miss Zembra was to be found at an evening party, that these hostile critics were not nearly so careless of her society as in common consistency they ought to have been.

Sabina did not live with her father. On a certain important occasion Sir Anthony had taken her to task and spoken his mind clearly.

'Understand me once for all, Sabina,' he observed in a more than ordinarily sententious way. 'I am not in the habit of wasting words. What I say I mean to be final. Now, while you were merely busying yourself about Industrial Homes and Training Ships, and things of that

kind, I did not object; no, nor did I mind your visiting this or that poor family, where you knew the circumstances, and knew there was no infection. But this new fad is quite different. What will happen after you come out of the hospital? You are not going in for six months' training for nothing.'

'Papa,' she broke in, 'I must do something—you don't know how dreadful idleness is.'

'I know that I don't hear your sisters complain,' he retorted. 'They seem to have enough to fill the time.'

'Yes, but they care for quite different things,' she said; and then she added, with the slightest of demure smiles hovering about her mouth, 'besides, they're ashamed of me. Mamma says I'm a dowdy; and it's quite true. I don't care for fine dresses, and driving in the Park. And then, you see, papa, I shouldn't mind playing the part of Cinderella—I shouldn't mind it at all, for Cinderella had plenty to do and knew she was of some use; but I know you wouldn't like that. You wouldn't like me to become one of the maids and sweep the kitchen.'

'Sabina, this is not a joking matter,' Sir Anthony observed shortly. 'Let us return to common sense. When you leave the East London Hospital a trained nurse, what then? I know very well. You will be more than ever in the slums; you will be for ever in the slums; and coming and going between them and this house. Well, now, that I cannot permit. It would not be right and just to the other

members of my family to subject them to such a continual risk of infection. It is not to be thought of.'

'Then do you want me to clear out, papa?' she said frankly.

'Yes, if you will persist in this folly.'

Well, she was a little bit startled, for a girl does not like being turned out of her father's house. On the other hand, her relations with her stepmother, Lady Zembra, and her half-sisters, Florence and Gertrude, had never been of the most satisfactory kind; not that they quarrelled, but that their modes of life and opinions and aims were so entirely different. So the ugly duckling was about to fly away.

'Of course,' continued Sir Anthony, 'the whole thing is foolish from the beginning. It is simply ludicrous for a young woman of your education and position to turn herself into a hospital nurse, when you can get dozens of women, of more hardened nerve, who could do the work ever so much better. But we've argued out that question before. I suppose you don't intend to change your mind?'

Surely his tone was unnecessarily hard, considering that he was turning her out of the house.

'Papa,' she said, 'I—I think I am doing what is right; but—but you might make it a little easier for me. It won't be holiday work.'

'If it is not the greatest happiness of the greatest

number,' Sir Anthony continued calmly, 'it is at least the safety of the greatest number that I have to consider. And I have thought the matter over. I am prepared to allow you £300 a year; that is ample maintenance, for you don't spend much on yourself. I have no doubt you will easily find some quiet respectable family, where there are no children to be put in danger, who will receive you as a boarder, if go you must——'

A sudden, happy light leapt to her eyes—those eyes in which 'her thoughts lay clear, as pebbles in a brook.' It had occurred to her that she could confer a kindness! Even in being thrust forth from her father's house, her first thought was that there was a chance of doing a friendly turn to certain folk she knew.

'The Wygrams, papa,' she said eagerly. 'Do you think they would take me? You know they are not very well off; Mr. Wygram never succeeds in any of the competitions now; and this might be a little something, if they were not offended. Oh, I know they would take me. Why, Janie spends half her time with me, now; I should be quite at home there!'

'That will be for yourself to decide,' said Sir Anthony.

And so it was that Sabina went to serve her six months at the East London Hospital. It was not at all romantic work. Occasionally, of course, she had her moments of exaltation; in crossing from the nurses' dormitory, in the strange silence and darkness of a winter morning,

and looking up to the vast, immeasurable skies, with the stars throbbing palely and distant, she would sometimes repeat to herself, as with a kind of ineffable longing—

Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far
Thro' all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean.

But there was little time for self-communing during the continuous labour of the long day; nor was she much given to pitying herself in any circumstances; it was the suffering of others that moved her, and here there was plenty of that, only too obvious, all around her. Moreover, she was a particularly healthy young woman; and she could bear fatigue better than any of her sister non-professionals, although when they got away to supper about half-past eight or nine, and all of them pretty well fagged out with the day's work, they used to joke her about her sleepy disposition. It was rumoured, moreover, that one or two of the medical students who came about had cast a favouring glance on this pretty, tall, benignant-eyed nurse, who looked so neat and smart in her belted gown and apron and cap, and that they paid a good deal more attention to her than to the patient whose condition she had to report to the doctor. But Sabie was impervious to all that kind of thing. It was only when she was with the other nurses at night that the dimple in her cheek appeared, and that she showed herself —as long as her eyes would keep open—blithe and friendly

and merry-hearted. Perhaps she was only a woman's woman, after all.

The long period of probation over, Sabina went to live with the Wygrams, a family who by dint of sore pinching still managed to occupy an old-fashioned house in Kensington Square that was endeared to them by its association with other and better days. Mr. Wygram had been at one time an architect in a fair way of business, and may have saved a little money then; but the capable partner in the firm died; things went badly somehow; and now the old gentleman, who was as industrious as ever, kept working away at competitive drawings, each time more and more confident that he was about to carry off the prize, and never doing so, but sometimes securing a few pounds by way of compensation. However, old Mr. and Mrs. Wygram were great favourites in the artist world of London; and very distinguished people, indeed, might be found together in the scantily-furnished and rather melancholy drawing-room —at an evening party, that is to say, with tea and darkly suspicious sherry and cake to crown the festivities. And what joy filled the heart of their only daughter, Janie, when she learned that her beloved Sabina was coming to live with them! Now there would be no risk of their chance evenings being dull; now there would be attraction and entertainment enough for all the world; and she would be accounted somebody among the young men—for that she could secure them, if she chose, an introduction to

Sabie; and she would take off Sabie's cloak when she came in, and get tea for her, and sit by her with their arms intertwined, and have her all to herself. In short, the arrangement came to work very well all round. The sum paid by Sabina for her board and lodging (though this was a covert transaction) was a certain addition to the finances of the establishment; Mrs. Wygram could be her chaperon when there was need; and Janie was her constant companion when she 'went about doing good.' For that was her occupation in life—as many a poor family down in Chelsea knew; and it came natural to her; and she was as busy and as content as the day was long. Then they had quiet evenings in the old-fashioned drawing-room; and the plain-featured, wistful-eyed Janie played very well; nor was she vexed when she looked round and found that her poor tired Sabie (who was very unconscionable in this respect) had dropped into a little snooze; and sometimes they had a game at whist, too; and sometimes a few young people would drop in, and they would have a pretence of supper, and a bit of a carpet dance. But always these young people —and especially the young men—treated Sabina with a certain deference. It was not that she was in any way socially their superior, for that was not the case; the Wygrams had a very excellent circle of friends and acquaintances. It was rather something in her manner that distinguished her from them. One would almost have taken her for a young and gentle-eyed matron looking on—not without sympathy and

pleasure—at the amusements of those boys and girls. She enjoyed their merriment as much as they did; and her laugh was ready and quite youthful and joyous when anything ridiculous happened; but ordinarily there was a kind of serious sweetness and grave kindliness in her eyes that seemed to keep her a little bit apart. She preferred to be a spectator—but surely a friendly one.

Of course she occasionally went up to see the family at Lancaster Gate, when she could solemnly assure them she had been near no infectious case; and it was on one of those visits that there occurred the unfortunate accident already referred to. She had chosen a Wednesday afternoon, knowing that her father would be early home from the House of Commons; but when she got to Lancaster Gate she found he had not arrived; Lady Zembra and Florence and Gertrude were out driving; the children were busy in the schoolroom. The only living thing to welcome her was the little spaniel Busy—an old friend and ally of hers; and it occurred to her that, to beguile the tedium of waiting, she might as well take the dog for a bit of a run along the Bayswater Road and back. He was nothing loth, it may be guessed; and so she opened the door and they went down the steps and made for the front pavement.

What next occurred may take some minutes to tell, but it seemed to her to happen all in one wild second.

'Now come here, Busy, you keep close to me,' she had

said on leaving the house; for she knew the habits of the spaniel kind, and that this one delighted in nothing so much as scampering about in the open thoroughfare—amid cabs and omnibuses and carriages—and always with his nose down as if he expected to flush a pheasant in the middle of the Bayswater Road. Busy paid heed to his mistress so long as she spoke to him; the moment they had reached the pavement he was off—careless of anything that might be coming along. She angrily called to him to come back—he turned in his scamper, but still with his nose down—and, alas! at the same instant she knew, rather than saw, that some one on a bicycle, approaching at an alarming speed, was almost on the dog.

'Look out! Take care!' she cried.

Now, no doubt the bicyclist had seen the little spaniel; and it is also possible that Busy might have got out of harm's way unaided; but at all events her sudden cry seemed to startle this young fellow, who was coming along at such a rate, and probably from gallantry as much as anything else he swerved sharply from his course, to make quite sure of missing the dog. Unhappily, at this precise spot there was a little heap of gravel, used for scattering over the wooden pavement, lying by the roadway; and apparently the bicycle caught on some of the pebbles; the next thing she saw was some terrible object hurling through the air and striking heavily against the kerbstone, where it lay motionless. The blood forsook her face, but

her courage was firm enough; she was at his side in a moment, trying to raise his head; and then a few bystanders came hurrying up, and she besought them to carry him into her father's house. White as her face was, she seemed calm and collected; there was an air of authority about her; they did not even suggest the hospital. Nor, it must be confessed, did she pay much heed to her father's remonstrances; her hands were full of work—work that she knew; moreover, Sir Anthony almost immediately retired, grumbling. She was left alone to deal with the wounded man, a maid assisting her, for the footman Willis had rushed off to summon the surgeon.

'Pore young gentleman!—pore young gentleman!' the maid kept saying; and was rather inclined to look on in a feebly commiserating attitude; but her pale-lipped young mistress had no time for mere pity.

'Catherine, get some calico—quick; and cut it into strips, and put them into cold water—look alive!'

For there was a bad scalp-wound on the side of the young man's head, and she had to stanch the blood, and thereafter bind the cold wet bandages round it. He lay in a heavy stupor, only that once he murmured the words 'cherry blossom,' and, busy as she was, it seemed pathetic to her that he should 'babble o' green fields.' And then, when she had bandaged his head, she passed her hands lightly over his neck, and back, and shoulders, and pretty well satisfied herself that there was no serious fracture or

dislocation: nevertheless she was anxious that the surgeon should appear forthwith.

She was moistening her patient's lips with cold water when he drew a long breath and slowly opened his eyes. He looked at her with a kind of mild wonder, and then at the room around him; then he seemed to recollect.

'That was a nasty one,' he managed to say. 'Did I hurt the dog?'

'Oh no, you did not,' Sabina said quickly. 'Pray don't think of that. I am so sorry. It was all my fault. I should not have called to you—I am so sorry.'

'Oh, don't trouble about me,' he said, with a faint kind of smile—for the shock and loss of blood had weakened him. 'This isn't my first cropper. There are no bones broken, I suppose——'

'I think not—I think not,' she said eagerly. 'And there will be a surgeon here directly.'

'But whose house is this?' he asked—it was all that he dared to ask.

'Sir Anthony Zembra's,' Sabina answered, and she added without embarrassment: 'I am his daughter. It was my little dog that made the mischief—or rather, I did myself. I do hope you are not seriously hurt.'

'Hurt? No, no—don't you bother. I shall be all right,' he said.

He was a fairly good-looking young fellow of some six or seven and twenty, with clear blue eyes, curly but short-

cropped hair of a reddish yellow, and a healthy pink and white complexion that had got a wash of sun-tan over it. Clearly he had lived much in the open air; and his frame seemed wiry and vigorous, with not an ounce of spare fat on it anywhere. As for guessing at his profession or calling or social status, that was not easy, seeing that he was clad in a bicycling suit; but his manner was well enough; and he seemed good-natured.

Suddenly he uttered a little involuntary exclamation, and bit his under-lip.

'What is it?' she said instantly.

'My knee—and I hardly moved it—oh, thunder!'

The pain in his face was obvious; and he was about to make some effort to raise himself, when she caught him, and caught him firmly.

'No, no; you must not move on any account—it may be serious—you must lie perfectly still till the doctor comes.'

'Yes, but when is he coming?' he said, with a touch of impatience. 'If I have broken my leg, I want to know. You don't understand what that would mean to me.'

'You have not broken your leg,' said she calmly, 'but you may have injured your knee.' And then she added, without any false shame or hesitation, 'If you like, I will see what harm is done and tell you. I know about these things; I have been in a hospital. Or if you would rather wait, I am sure the doctor will be here in a few minutes.'

'Oh, of course, I will wait — I could not think of troubling you,' he said instantly.

'And in the meantime I will make a splint,' said she, 'just in case it should be necessary. Catherine, run and get me some cotton wool.'

She went to the table, tore the cover off one of the children's drawing-books, and cut a strip of the thick pasteboard about three inches wide, and over a dozen long; and she was in the act of swathing the improvised splint in cotton wool when the young surgeon arrived. Everything she had done he approved of; but he was not surprised; he was well aware of Miss Zembra's qualifications. Then came the examination of the knee; and that was simple enough, for he had merely to unbuckle the knee-band of the knickerbockers; but the next moment he had grown grave. Sabina had withdrawn a step or two; her assistance was not needed.

'What is it, doctor?' the young man said, noticing that look.

'Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you that you've dislocated your knee-cap, and there's a bad bruise beside. Miss Zembra, I haven't brought anything with me—your man met me in the street——'

Sabina came forward.

'Here is a kind of a splint,' she said, 'and I think there's enough calico here for a figure-of-eight bandage—if that will do in the meantime——'

'In the meantime that will do excellently, until I run home and get some things.'

'But, doctor,' the young man on the couch said, and he was rather pale now, partly from loss of blood, no doubt, but also partly from anxiety, 'what does all this mean? Is it really so bad? You don't mean that I'm to be laid up with a splint? Why, how soon—how soon, now, shall I be all right again? Not long, surely!'

'I don't wish to alarm you,' the surgeon said in reply, 'but I ought to warn you that it is a rather serious case, and that the greatest care will be wanted. Even then it may be months before you can put your foot to the ground.'

'God bless me, you don't know what you're saying!' the young man cried faintly, and very white his face was now.

'I'm afraid I do,' the surgeon said quietly.

The other remained silent for a second or two; then he said, with a kind of forced resignation, 'When can I be taken to my own rooms?'

The doctor turned to Sabina.

'It is a serious case,' said he, 'I would not advise his removal, if your people would not mind letting him have the use of this room, for a few days even.'

'Oh, but they must; of course they will,' Sabina exclaimed eagerly. 'Oh, you don't know, doctor; it was all my fault that the accident happened; I am more grieved about it than I can say; I cannot even think of it; and

what we can do we must do; but how can I ever atone for such an injury?'

'The young lady had nothing to do with it,' said the maimed man; but he had to hold his breath now, for the surgeon was about to put his knee in the splint.

By and by, when the doctor was giving a few parting directions to Sabina (who had already installed herself as nurse, the maid Catherine assisting), and promising to be back shortly, the young man on the couch called to him in rather a faint voice:

'Doctor!'

'Yes?'

'I wish you would do me a favour, will you?'

'Certainly.'

'When you are out, will you go to a telegraph-office and wire to the Duke—the Duke of Exminster—that I shan't be able to ride Cherry Blossom for him in the Grand National? It's hard luck, it is. Twenty times have I dreamt of lifting the old horse over Valentine's Brook. Don't forget—the Duke of Exminster—he's at Helmsley just now. Well, it's hard luck; I knew the horse. Nobody else can do anything with him but myself. I could see us over the ditch and rail fence near the bridge and fairly in the line for home. Poor old Cherry Blossom—it's very hard luck.'

'And from whom shall I telegraph?' the doctor said gently.

'Oh, my name, you mean? Fred Foster, Bury Street; the Duke knows.'

Sabina had left the room for a minute or two, and so remained undeceived as to the mistake she had made about his having 'babbled o' green fields.' But that was not of much account, perhaps. What was of more account, at least to one very tender heart, was that poor Janie Wygram was now to be deprived for many a long day to come of the society and companionship of her beloved Sabie.

CHAPTER III

WALTER LINDSAY

It is rather a sorry thing in these times to have to speak of a man who is in love; for in the eyes of most people—especially of the young men of the day—he seems to be considered a sentimental jackass; unless, indeed, the woman he is in love with should happen to be a married woman; and then the whole situation becomes intelligible, and even something to be mildly envied. However, Walter Lindsay was in love, and very much in love; and not with a married woman; but with Sabina Zembra.

'Poor fellow,' Janie Wygram would say to her mother; 'I do believe he is the most wretched man in this country; and yet you would think he had everything that a human being could wish for. Good-looking—well, I call him most distinguished-looking and handsome; with pleasant manners, a favourite everywhere, every woman anxious to have him at her house, and people beginning to speak of him as almost if not quite the first landscape-painter in England; with a splendid career before him; with plenty of money, a beautiful house, and heaps of friends; and then his family

—well, no wonder he is a little proud of the Lindsays of Carnryan, and of the old tower overlooking the sea: just think of all that, mother, and yet I know it is worthless to him just because he cannot have Sabie's love—and Sabie's love he never will have in this world.'

'Don't be so sure,' the mother would answer.

'Ah, but I know,' the plain-featured gray-eyed Janie would continue (and she seemed rather to like talking about Miss Zembra). 'I know the only way to win Sabie's love; it's through her pity. If you're poor, or ragged, or suffering—and look to her for help—that is the only way. Then her eyes grow soft. But why should she pity Mr. Lindsay, or take any interest in him? He has everything the world can give him—handsome, famous, with plenty of money and plenty of friends—how should he appeal to her pity?'

'Don't you say that he is miserable?'

Janie smiled a little—but not out of malice.

'She doesn't understand that kind of misery. No, nor that kind of love either. If you speak to her of that kind of love, she only laughs and turns away. Sabie will never marry—never.'

'Don't be so sure,' the mother would repeat: she had seen more things happen than her daughter had.

'Ah, but I know. And why should she marry? Doesn't she see how great a delight she can give to so many people? And it's so easy for her, mother. She has only to smile and look pleased, and people are grateful. When she

comes into a room, it's like bringing sunlight; everybody's face brightens up. I wonder,' continued Janie Wygram, rather wistfully, 'if beautiful people know how thankful they should be for their beauty? I wonder if they know how easy it is for them to make friends—and to be kind——'

'I wish you would stop talking about her,' her mother would probably interpose at this juncture. 'She has made a fool of you.'

'And you, mother? You don't see much in Sabie? Well, it's a shame to speak of her as if it was only her beauty. It's her goodness. She's "better than she's bonny"—if that is possible.'

'She has got a stanch champion, anyway.'

One afternoon the young artist whose name was introduced so frequently in their repeated conversations was in his studio, up Ladbroke Grove way, and he was seated at an open piano, though he was not playing. He was a man of about eight and twenty or thirty, tall and spare, pale of face, with perfectly coal-black hair, and black eyes that were contemplative rather than observant—at least they were so at this moment. The studio was a large and handsome apartment, hung with tapestry, and stored with all kinds of *bric-à-brac*, that spoke of Spain, and Tunis, and Egypt mostly, though there was a nondescript and picturesque variety and confusion prevailing throughout. Damascus-ware jugs, old violins, bits of Italian embroidery, Indian swords, eighteenth century ale-jugs, Sheraton chairs,

pictures framed and unframed, photographs of popular actresses, wooden pipes, sheaves of brushes, books, stray music, invitation cards, Persian rugs, Rhodian dishes, tennis balls, cigar boxes, Syrian silks, all were flung together anyhow; but besides these ordinary paraphernalia of a modern studio, there were certain 'properties' more particularly wanted for the landscape artist's special work—a great mass of freshly-cut golden-blossomed furze, a sheaf of dried bulrushes, the stem of a birch tree with its hanging silvery flakes, and everywhere bunches of early spring flowers stuck carelessly into pots. And yet there was a kind of harmony in all this entanglement of things; they seemed appropriate; perhaps the sombre grayness of the afternoon had its effect. And perhaps, too, that had its effect on the mind of the young man sitting at the piano. When he put his fingers on the keys it was in a musing kind of way; and the chance bits of Mendelssohn or Chopin that he absently played seemed to come unsought for, as if it were his memory that was speaking to him. Sometimes his fingers rested idle; and then the silence was almost painfully distinct; for the studio was separated from the house by a strip of garden, and there was not even the ticking of a clock to be heard. He played one or two little waltzes by Mozart—curiously quaint and simple and melodious. He hummed to himself, as he touched the notes, Lillo's

Ritorna ch'io t'amo, mio primo sospir.

But by and by this languid and careless occupation

ceased altogether; he sat for a little time plunged in a vague reverie; and then, as with an effort, he rose, shut the piano mechanically, and turned to face the empty studio. This seemed to bring him to his senses somewhat.

'It's a queer world,' he said to himself.

And yet he seemed irresolute. He took up a wooden pipe, but almost immediately put it down again; then he went and stood in front of the unfinished landscape that was on the easel. It was a large water-colour drawing—an evening scene; the spire of a village church rising dark into the golden glow of the sunset sky; a river stealing in shadow underneath a grove of dusky elms; empty meadows with a pearly gray mist rising from them. It seemed to suggest silence, and remoteness, and perhaps a trifle of sadness too, for the day was dying away in the west, and the velvet-footed night coming stealthily over the land. But what a time and a place for lovers! There were no figures in this landscape; he had intentionally left it without any sign of life; it seemed secret and sacred at this sad hour; there was not even a swallow skimming over that still-flowing stream. But what, now, if some veiled and hooded maiden were to appear out of the golden glow beyond and come swiftly with timid footstep along by the hushed meadows and the whispering reeds? Could the gracious heavens be so bountiful—on some such evening as this—in the coming years—and she, the one maiden in all the world, be actually there, and he hastening towards her

with wildly beating heart? Easily could he recognise her figure far away; there was but the one. And then the untying of the hood—and the beautiful tender eyes benignant —Sabina!

'If I were on my deathbed,' he said to himself, 'the image of that woman would come between me and my grave.'

But what had Sabina done that he should be angry with her? If he chose to make a fool of himself about a woman (he said to himself), that was none of her fault. And so, as the afternoon was dreary and uncomfortable, and not conducive to work, and the studio very silent and lonely, and the associations of this picture rather melancholy, he thought he would go away and seek for some society somewhere. And whose? Why, Janie Wygram's, to be sure—if haply he might find her at home. If not the rose, she was near the rose; and she would have something to say to him about Sabina.

He put on his hat and overcoat—and also a pair of gloves, for artists have abandoned their Bohemian manners and customs nowadays, and he was about to pay an afternoon call. And as he walked away over Campden Hill Road, and so down into Kensington, how was it that his eye instinctively sought out any tall woman that he could see in the distance? It was very unlikely that accident should bring Sabina in his way. And yet the remote possibility was always there; and it lent an interest to all the

neighbourhood of Kensington; and it had become an unconscious habit with him to look far ahead with this half-defined hope always present with him. And then, again, where the High Street narrows there is an abundance of shops; and there mammas and daughters congregate, passing by the windows slowly; and if by chance he were to find Sabina in that throng! In especial there was a florist's shop that was of interest to him; for Sabina, when she came round that way, generally called there to carry home some flowers for Mrs. Wygram, who herself could not well afford such luxuries. However, on this particular afternoon (as on many and many another one) his half-intentional scrutiny was fruitless; and so he turned down Young Street and made for the Wygrams' house in Kensington Square.

Janie was upstairs in her mother's room; she saw him come along the pavement.

'There's Mr. Lindsay, mother.'

'You must go down, then, and make some excuse. I can't see him in this state; besides, I'm busy.'

'Oh, I can entertain him well enough, mother,' the younger woman said. 'You've only to talk to him about Sabie.'

Of course, it was not Mr. Lindsay who introduced that subject when these two were seated in the dusky drawing-room. Oh no; Mr. Lindsay talked about theatres, and new books, and music; and when Miss Wygram incidentally mentioned that Sabie was spending that afternoon with her

people at Lancaster Gate, he did not say anything at all. Nay, when Miss Wygram (who was a kind-hearted creature) would insist on talking about Sabie, and the good she was doing, and her kindness, and her gentleness, and her courage, and all the rest, he listened respectfully, it is true, but did not betray much interest.

'Of course she has her faults,' said Janie.

'Oh, indeed,' said he (thinking himself very cunning). 'Well, now, it would be something to hear of them. As every one has nothing but praises for Miss Zembra, it would be quite refreshing to hear unkind things said of her.'

Janie winced. That she should be thought capable, even in jest, of saying unkind things of her dearest? Nevertheless she continued :

'Oh yes, she has faults, and plenty,' she said cheerfully. 'How could one love her if she were perfect? Faults, oh yes. For one thing she is a little too anxious to have every one fond of her. She can't bear that any one should be quite indifferent about her. She likes to be well thought of. I don't know that it is exactly vanity—for it is not her appearance she thinks of—it's herself that she wants people to like. And more than that, she insists on it. If an ill-conditioned brat of a boy will have nothing to say to her, you will see her deliberately neglect the whole of the family until she has won him over in spite of himself. Or an old woman. Old women are sometimes cynical. They distrust

pretty eyes. Then you should see Sabie. Oh, she is a hypocrite—an out-and-out hypocrite. But that is the one thing she cannot bear—that anybody should be quite indifferent about her.'

'So far,' said he, 'Miss Zembra's faults don't seem to be very serious. Some people would call them virtues. I don't think it is much against a woman—and particularly a young woman—that she should wish to be thought well of. It seems to me quite natural. And as for wishing people to be fond of her, surely that is natural too! The strange thing to me is that she should experience any difficulty.'

She knew he would come to Sabie's defence—knew it perfectly when she began. And she thought she would reward him; she had observed his eyes wandering occasionally towards a photograph that stood on the mantelpiece; she went and fetched that.

'This is the last that has been done of Sabie; do you think it like?'

He took the photograph in his hand.

'Like——' he said, after a second. 'Why, it's herself—her very self! And so natural and simple the whole thing—and so good-natured she looks.'

'Would you care to have it?' she said, with an air of indifference. She meant him to understand that she could have as many photographs of Sabie as she chose.

He looked up quickly and eagerly.

'May I have it?'

'Oh yes, if you care for it. I have plenty of others. Only a studio is such a public place—people come strolling in, and you would have to explain that it was I who gave it you.'

'But do you think I would have it lying about? I can assure you, no. If I may have it I will lock it away as my greatest treasure.'

'Oh, but you must not say such things,' said Miss Janie, laughing. 'And about the studio, Mr. Lindsay, I hope you did not think it rude of us going in the other day?'

'It was the most awful piece of bad luck that ever happened to me that I should have been out,' he answered. 'And Mrs. Reid not to have offered you tea! She's a dreadfully stupid woman, that woman.'

'But I suppose she was so frightened by our boldness,' said Miss Janie. 'You see, it was such a temptation. Sabie had never been in a studio before. And then mother happened to be with us; and it was really her doing; for when Mrs. Reid said you were not at home, mother said: "Oh, that's all right; we'll go and rummage over the place." And Sabie said: "Oh, he's so good-natured, he won't mind." And you should have seen how interested she was—especially in the embroidery; and she wondered who could have taught you to pick up such things. Yes, and the picture—you should have heard what she said——'

'But which one?' he said quickly; it was all music to his ears.

'The one on the easel—you know—the one with the church and the trees and the river—the evening one——'

'Did she like that?'

'Oh yes; you should have heard. And when Sabie likes a thing, she tells you.'

'Miss Wygram, would you do me a very, very great favour?' said he. 'Do you think you could get her to accept it?'

'What?'

'That picture. Do you think Miss Zembra would take it? I should be so glad if she would. It is a fair exchange. I have her portrait. Do you think she would take that drawing, if I finished it and had it framed for her?'

'But what would she do with it?' Miss Janie said; she was a little bit frightened, thinking she had said too much; and she knew that Mr. Lindsay's pictures fetched very large prices, for water-colours.

'Why, she might hang it up in her room, if she cared anything for it at all. Or over there—she might hang it there—and it would be hers all the same. Do you think you could induce her to accept it—if it was framed, and made a little more presentable?'

'Oh no, no, no, Mr. Lindsay,' Miss Janie said earnestly. 'It's bad enough for a parcel of strangers to go into an artist's studio——'

'Strangers!' said he.

'But to plunder him as well, simply because you happen to say you like a particular picture——'

'But you don't know,' he broke in. 'Why, you don't know what pleasure it would give me if Miss Zembra would only take that picture. It's nothing. It's a foolish kind of thing. But if she sees anything in it—if she would take it——'

'I'm sure she would not,' said Miss Janie promptly; 'and I know I should get into sad trouble if she discovered that I was the cause of your making so generous an offer. But—but—now, shall I be frank with you?'

'Yes; but be frank in this way. I will give you the picture, and you will hang it up in her room,' said he.

'Oh no; how could that be? But—but—if you would make a small sketch of it—something that would not cost you too much trouble—I'm sure she would be glad to have that.'

'Are you sure she would take it?' he said eagerly.

'I'm sure she would be very, very much pleased to have it,' said Miss Janie frankly. 'But you see how it is, Mr. Lindsay; it's difficult for people who are not artists to accept a valuable picture. It's all very well for artists, who can repay in kind.'

'Then you think there is nothing in winning approval —there is nothing in being able to gratify a friend?' said he.

'Oh yes; if every one was as pretty as Sabie, I could understand it,' she rejoined. 'But even in her case——'

And then he grew bold.

'Now I am going to tell you something,' said he, 'and to ask of you the greatest favour I ever asked of anybody. Have you heard of Borella, the new baritone? No? Well, he has only sung at one or two houses, privately, as yet; but he is something wonderful, I assure you; the quality of his voice is perfectly marvellous, and the skill with which he adapts it to a small room just as marvellous, too. Well, he is coming to my studio Thursday next week, in the evening; and there will be a few young people there; and there will be a little music, and a little supper, and so forth; and I was wondering if your mother and you would be so kind as to join the little party. You see——'

'I think I know,' interposed Miss Janie, with a smile; and although she was not pretty, she could look friendly and amiable on occasion, and she had a little sympathy with this unhappy young man. 'I think I know. You would like mother to go up in the afternoon, and have a little chat with Mrs. Reid about the supper, and the arrangement of the flowers, and so forth?'

'Would she be so kind?'

'But as for me,' said Miss Janie demurely, 'what use should I be? Well, would you like me to bring Sabie with me?'

He lowered his eyes to hide their anxiety.

'Do you think Miss Zembra would care to come up for

even half an hour?' said he. 'Borella is a very good-natured fellow; he told me that if he came at all it would be to sing for my guests. I think she would be pleased. I am sure she would be pleased.'

'But that's not the way to put it when you're talking about Sabie. The question is—Can she do a kindness to anybody?'

'I should consider it more than a kindness,' he said in rather a low voice.

'Oh, I'll bring Sabie along,' Miss Janie said cheerfully.

'Will you?' he said. He looked up. 'It is a promise, mind. And you know, Miss Janie' (for he permitted himself this familiarity on rare occasions), 'I am going to insist on your taking that sunset sketch as a present from me. Oh yes, you must. When I have offered anybody anything, then it is no longer mine.'

'But, good gracious, Mr. Lindsay, what should I do with such a valuable picture?' said Miss Janie, frightened again.

'It will become valuable if you accept it,' said he gently. 'And there is the very place to hang it, over there; and if Miss Zembra would care to have a little replica of it, I should be very happy to do that for her at any time.'

He rose and took his hat.

'I will send your mother a little reminder note about Thursday next week,' said he. 'And I hope you won't forget your promise about Miss Zembra.'

'Oh, I'll bring Sabie along,' was the confident answer. 'Good-bye.'

Dark had fallen over Kensington now; but for him the gray melancholy that hung about the dismal streets was filled with all kinds of brilliant and happy visions. Sabina was coming to his little party; and now the question was as to what he could do and plan and contrive for the entertainment of this radiant visitor. Neither Mrs. Reid nor Mrs. Wygram, to begin with, was to be entrusted with the supper arrangements; he would go forthwith to a famous confectioner and bid him do his best, sparing neither cost nor trouble. And he would call on the great baritone, and make sure of him. Then, whatever Covent Garden could produce in the way of flowers would make that one night sweet and memorable; with this proviso, that while the florist might exercise his fancy as he pleased with regard to the little bouquets or button-holes placed on the table for the guests, he—that is to say, the host himself—would reserve for himself, and for himself alone, the devising of the bouquet that Sabina would find awaiting her!

CHAPTER IV

FRED FOSTER

An angry man indeed was Sir Anthony Zembra when he found that the stranger who had been thus unceremoniously thrust into his house promised to be a fixture there, at least for a considerable time. And naturally he was impatient to know who he was; but he would not ask Sabina; he made his inquiries of Dr. Hungerford, plainly intimating the while that as likely as not this unwelcome guest was a common swindler, and all the fuss about the hurt knee part of a scheme of robbery.

'He would be an enterprising burglar who would get himself smashed about like that on purpose,' said the young surgeon, laughing. 'Anyhow, Sir Anthony, it will be many a day before he is able to run away with anything. And I will say this for him: he tries to make as light of his injuries as may be—especially if Miss Zembra is within hearing, and talks quite contentedly about the whole affair. He has pluck, at all events——'

'Yes, yes; but—but—God bless my soul, I want to know who he is! Who is he? What is he?' Sir Anthony demanded.

'Well, I think I should call him, speaking generally, a sporting character,' the surgeon answered. 'At least I can't make out that he has any occupation besides riding steeplechases, backing horses, playing billiards, and so forth; but his interest in such matters seems to be of an all-round character. He offered to lay me six to four on Oxford for the boat-race.'

'Professional conversation!' Sir Anthony said.

'My fault, at all events,' the young surgeon said promptly. 'Well, it is neither that race nor any other that he'll be present at for many a day to come, poor fellow.'

'What I want to know is,' observed Sir Anthony, coldly, 'when you mean to remove him from this house. I don't see that we are responsible for the accident in any way whatever; and really to have one's domestic arrangements upset in this fashion, on behalf of a stranger, is perfectly absurd. Common humanity? Common stupidity! When is this gentleman jockey, or whatever he is—"gentleman jock" is the phrase, isn't it?—when is he going to clear out of my house?'

'Well, now, Sir Anthony,' the surgeon said, 'I would beg of you not to hurry his removal. I would rather not run any risk, unless you have imperative need of the room. I daresay everything will go on well; his constitution seems to be a sound and healthy one; and as soon as it is fairly safe we will have him taken away—but not to his own rooms, I hope. Bury Street, St. James's, is not a very

cheerful place for a man who will have to be on his back for the next month or two. I don't know what his means are; but if he could afford to go to Brighton—if he were to get a front room on the King's Road or the Marine Parade, that would be more lively for him. And then on a fine day he might be wheeled down the pier on a stretcher, and get the sea air and the sunlight into his blood.'

'I cannot say that I feel called upon to concern myself about the young man,' observed Sir Anthony, in his lofty manner, 'although one naturally wishes him a speedy recovery In the meantime I shall be glad to have the use and freedom of my own house again at the very earliest opportunity.'

Lady Zembra, for her part, flatly declined to allow the maid Catherine to be for ever dancing attendance on the sick-room; and as Sabina could not do everything herself —and as, moreover, she could not wholly neglect certain charges of hers down in the Chelsea district—she got in a trained nurse to help her, defraying the cost out of her own pocket. But she herself spent a large portion of each day in the invalid's chamber; and she would bring him newspapers and illustrated journals and books, and would sit amiably chatting with him to lighten the tedium of this enforced confinement. Fred Foster, it must be confessed, was not much of a reader; when he had glanced at the latest betting for the Lincolnshire Handicap, and seen how Cherry Blossom stood for the Liverpool Grand National,

he was content to put the evening paper aside, and would rather talk to Sabina, in a timid and respectful and grateful way. And yet he spoke cheerfully, too, for he would not have her think he was fretting overmuch; and as they became better friends he was quite frankly garrulous about himself, and his experiences, and companions, and pursuits. It was a new world, this that was being opened to her; and yet it was interesting in a fashion; for she was a friendly and sympathetic kind of creature, and accustomed to meeting diverse people, who all had their own way of life. And there was a sort of good-natured cynicism and saturnine honesty in this young man's talk that was in a measure attractive; and he seemed to have seen a good deal of the world for one of his years.

But it was when he told her all about his home in Buckinghamshire, and the old people there, that he pleased her most. It appeared that he was returning from a visit to them (having sent on his portmanteau by rail) when he met with the smash in Bayswater Road. His father, he told her, had a good many years ago laid out his last penny on property down Amersham and Missenden way, in the expectation of a railway being made along the valley; but the railway never came; land would not sell at all; farms were letting badly; and times were not as they used to be. Still, that seemed a comfortable home that he talked about; and Sabina, sitting in this silent room and listening with friendly interest to his idle discourse, could see for herself the big,

old-fashioned, red-brick house fronting the road; a row of tall elms outside; inside the low, wide hall, with its pillars; rambling corridors and rooms with casemented windows; a spacious garden behind; and, busy in the vineries, an old gentleman in velveteen coat and gaiters, with a velvet cap and tassel on his head, a pair of shears in his hands, and not far away from him a long clay pipe.

'But it's the Mater,' he would say (and he was fond of returning to this point, and Sabina liked to hear him speak in this fashion),—'it's the Mater has been my stand-by through thick and thin; and whatever happens to me, I know I've got one friend. Well, you see, the governor has been rather inclined to cut up rough with me from time to time, and no wonder, for I have been an idle wretch; I mean, the only things I can do well don't seem to bring in much coin, and I daresay I have been a disappointment to him. But the old lady is my stanch friend through everything. And mind, I don't mean only in the way of money. No, no. You see, Miss Zembra, a man who has had a little experience in turf affairs, and mixed himself up in that kind of life—well, I don't suppose that he can have the highest notions about human nature, and be too ready to believe in people; but it's a very capital thing for him if he knows that somewhere or other—no matter where, but somewhere—there is one human being that is just as good as gold. I suppose, now, at my age, my one perfect human being should be a young woman, not an old one—a divinity

and angel about eighteen or twenty. Well, I've never met any of that kind; I've never met any girl even fit to be compared to my mother. It isn't ribbons, and scents, and a dogcart and a pair of ponies driven tandem, for her; she doesn't think what she can get out of you; it's what she can do for you, that she thinks of; she's just as good as gold, she is.'

'And I hope and am sure you will always think so,' Sabina said. 'But why should you have disappointed your father?'

'Well, you see, my wares don't fetch a big price in the world's market,' said he, and there was an odd kind of simplicity in his self-disparagement. 'What am I to do? I can ride a horse; and I've even been complimented at times for a niceish bit of mouth-touching. And I play a fair game at billiards. And I'd back myself at a pigeon-match even against the Claimant, and that is saying something——'

'Pigeon-shooting?' she said—there was the least trace of surprise in her tone, and that of itself was a compliment.

'I beg your pardon—I shouldn't have mentioned that,' he said, laughing a little. 'Sentiment has changed. But don't you believe the nonsense that is talked about pigeon-shooting, either, Miss Zembra. It used to be the most fashionable thing going; it isn't now; and why? Because it's easy? Because it's merely slaughter? Not a bit; it's because it's too difficult—and a score is kept. If you put

a man into a hot corner at a pheasant-shoot and let him blaze away, he'll make a bag somehow, and nobody counts the misses ; it's different in an open field, with a crowd of fashionable people looking on, and the reporters with their note-books just behind you. Did you ever hear of the Lords and Commons pigeon-shooting match at Hurlingham? No ; before your time, I suppose. And before mine, too, rather ; but I've seen the score ; and if you look at that score you'll find how it was that pigeon-shooting ceased to be fashionable. People always turn their backs on what they can't do. You don't like to have all your lady-friends looking on while you show what a duffer you are ; and you don't want to have the score in the newspapers next day. Then don't you believe the stories about the maiming of the pigeons either ; that's all newspaper nonsense. Do you think they'd get a single man to lay a sovereign if anything like that were allowed? No, no ; and of course the betting-men back the pigeon ; they know he'll play fair ; they may not be sure about the noble sportsman ; but they know the bird will try to get away if he can. You can't "pull" a pigeon.'

However, he saw by the expression of her face—and 'in her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear, as pebbles in a brook'—that this was not a wholly grateful subject ; and he got away from it. She was far more pleased by his descriptions of the morning gallops, before breakfast, on Epsom Downs ; and he spoke rather wistfully about them ; and she

thought it a pitiable thing that he should be lying here, helpless. But whether he spoke wistfully or cheerfully, all the way through these chance conversations there ran an innocent assumption that she must be interested; and she did become interested, without hardly knowing why. For one thing, he talked about horses with a genuine enthusiasm; and she grew to sympathise in his admiration of skilful riding; and could almost understand how Jem Robinson burst into tears of vexation when he found he had been tricked by the lad Twitchet; and she was sorry for Fordham when she was told how Sam Rogers had served him the same turn. It was a new world to her; and there were plenty of strange characters in it, and striking incidents, and moving histories. She grew almost familiar with its physical aspects; when he described the Grand National course, she had to construct in her imagination the successive thorn-fences and hurdles bushed with gorse, and Beecher's Brook, and Valentine's Brook, and the Water Jump, and then again the hurdles on the straight way for home. Cherry Blossom was now at 11 to 2, and still first favourite; and how could she help hoping the horse would win, seeing that this young man, who seemed so good-natured, and cheerful, and patient, under his grievously bad luck, was so obviously anxious about it?

The Duke of Exminster called on Fred Foster to see how he was getting on; and very sorry was that young gentleman that Sabina happened to be out.

'Very sorry,' he said; 'I should like you to have met, if just for once, the very straightest man that ever had anything to do with the English turf—the very straightest, and all his life through, too. I wonder who ever heard of him "readying" a horse and running it out of form so as to scoop the big handicap afterwards——'

'But is it so unusual to find an honest man on the turf?' Sabina asked.

He did not answer; he only said evasively, and a little grimly, 'Horse-racing is a great game; and it has got to be played different ways.'

Now, as has already been said, the training that Sabina had voluntarily undergone had taught her a wide catholicity of sympathy; and she had long ago got rid of any Pharisaical notion that because a certain way of life is right for this or that person, it is necessarily so for all. This kind of life that he described, if it did not appear to be informed by any lofty purpose, or to be exerting any beneficial influence on others, was nevertheless apparently joyous and merry, and so far it was distinctly well; while it was certainly not one whit more selfish than the lives of the vast majority of the people—highly respectable and praiseworthy people—whom she saw around her. Perhaps there was a trifle too much luncheon-basket in it; and there was a pretty continuous popping of champagne-bottles; but on the other hand that was probably the handiest way of celebrating victories; and, for the rest, there seemed to be a consider-

able amount of good comradeship and generous help for the unfortunate in this set that he described. Nay, when she began and told him a little of how she spent her own time—what her occupations were, and so forth—he said he was quite ashamed of himself; and wondered what she would think of him, who could but talk of horses, and hounds, and partridges, and tennis courts, while she was engaged in such unselfish and noble work.

'But then,' said he, looking at her, 'there are not many like you.'

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Oh, I can't tell you to your face,' he answered gently; and then an unaccustomed flush mantled in the pale and beautiful forehead; and she turned quickly aside to get for him his lemon-juice and soda-water, which was the beverage allowed him at this time.

On another occasion he said, 'You know, it's awfully good of you, Miss Zembra, to bother yourself about me, and to come and chat with me now and again; and you so busy. But I have remorse of conscience; I have indeed. I really must ask you not to let me take up so much of your time—there are so many others who have better claims.'

'Perhaps you forget how you came to be here at all,' said Sabina.

'Oh, but you must put that out of your head,' he insisted. 'You were in no way responsible for the accident. Anybody's dog would have brought about the same thing.

Or rather, it was my own stupidity that did it; for I should have seen the little heap of gravel. Or rather—and this is the truth—it was a piece of pure bad luck. I've come a cropper many a time before; but this time, by pure bad luck, I chanced to hit the kerbstone. Well, why should you consider yourself responsible for that? However, you must not think me ungrateful for all your goodness to me; and I have been wondering whether you wouldn't let me take a little part in what you are doing. I mean,' he added, with a touch of half-amused embarrassment, 'you might bring me luck—that is, supposing Schiller were to win the Shipley Hall Handicap on Tuesday next, would you accept a ten-pound note for distribution among your poor people?'

'Oh yes, certainly, if you care to give it me,' said Miss Zembra promptly; she had long ago ceased to be squeamish about such matters.

'It's rather a shabby offer, isn't it, to make it conditional?' he continued. 'But every loose farthing I've got I've put on that horse; and if I were out and about now I'd sell my boots, I believe, and clap everything on; for it's as good as a moral, so the Duke says. And then there's the glory—you see, I own a sixth share in this horse——'

Miss Zembra had taken up the evening paper; she wanted to know something about the animal that was perhaps to win ten pounds for her.

The Derby Meeting,' he said. 'The Shipley Hall Handicap.'

'Oh yes, here it is,' she said. 'Schiller, 4 to 1 against. That does not look promising, does it?'

'Promising enough. I wish it was 20 to 1. I know the old horse will pull it off for us this time, though it isn't a big thing. We can't all be dukes.'

'But with regard to the ten pounds, now,' said Sabina rather diffidently; 'I am afraid I accepted heedlessly.'

'Oh, a bargain's a bargain,' he said, with much cheerfulness; 'and I think you'll find by next Tuesday afternoon that Schiller has landed you that ten-pound note for your pensioners: the money might go a worse way.'

It may be said generally that he bore this imprisonment with really remarkable fortitude, the more so that, when Sabina was absent, the other members of the household did nothing at all to relieve his solitude. Lady Zembra was so kind as to make inquiries about him from day to day of the nurse; and Sir Anthony would ask an occasional question of the doctor; but it was very clear that their solicitude was prompted solely by their desire to know when he was going away. In these circumstances, Sabina did what she could to keep him amused; and gave him as much of her time as was possible; and in this way she came to know his history, even from his boyhood's days, in a curiously intimate fashion. He liked to talk; he was grateful to so gentle and considerate a listener; for, indeed, in

her attitude towards him there was an almost maternal kindliness and patience and sympathy. One would scarcely have remembered that, as a matter of fact, he was a couple of years older than she was. He talked to her as if he knew she would pass no harsh judgment when he made confession; and also as if he was sure beforehand that she would like well enough to know all about his first pistol, and his adventures with his pony, and his bird-stuffing, and his various scrapes at school, and the gradual way in which in after life he became associated with the sporting world. She got to understand all about his somewhat strained relations with his father; his dependence on his mother, and his abundant gratitude towards her; his general habits of life; his opinions of particular men; his manner of looking at the tricks of fickle fortune. Moreover, through all this self-revelation there ran a vein of sarcasm that gave it piquancy. His judgment of people and things was shrewd and sharp; so was his judgment of himself; and there was a kind of innocent saturnine honesty about him that amused her, and attracted her at the same time.

'If I had broken my neck that time I pitched on the pavement,' he said, on one occasion, 'I suppose I should have had to give an account of myself. Well, I should just have said this: "Lord, there are some would tell you I was a very good sort of fellow; but I know I've been rather a bad sort of fellow; only, I was just what you made me."'

And it was hardly her business to point out to him that this theory of moral responsibility—or irresponsibility—was of a primitive and unworkable character. One thing, finally, was certain; this man interested her; and Janie Wygram had maintained that, so far, Sabina had never shown herself interested (in Janie's sense of the phrase) in any man.

CHAPTER V

SER FEDERIGO'S FALCON

NATURALLY Janie Wygram regarded with anything but favour the young man who was thus claiming so much of her beloved Sabie's attention; and her jealousy of him made her all the more determined that Sabina should go to Walter Lindsay's party.

'But why should I go?' Sabina said quite good-naturedly. 'Some people are interested in such things, but I am not. Standing about among a lot of half-strangers and trying to talk about things that are quite indifferent to you——'

'Oh, but Sabie, you don't know,' her friend said; 'it's not like that at Mr. Lindsay's. They're small parties, and there's no one asked who isn't either clever, or pretty, or remarkable in some way; and there is every kind of freedom and amusement and merriment. You will find no old people there at all except mother, who is to play duenna for all of us.'

'No, no, Janie,' Sabina said; 'I should most likely be tired by that time of night, and you wouldn't want a

kill-joy to come in among a lot of young folks amusing themselves.'

'But you can't help going, Sabie, dear,' her friend said insidiously.

'Indeed. And why?'

'Not when I tell you that you will confer a great kindness on several people, and on two in particular. That is enough reason for you, Sabie.'

Sabina laughed; it was a dexterous piece of flattery.

'But who are the two people in particular?' she asked.

'Mr. Lindsay is the one, and I am the other.'

'Then I will go to please you,' Sabina said, in her frank and generous way; and forthwith the glad-hearted Janie made swiftly for her own room to send a little note to Mr. Lindsay, informing him of the joyful news.

As the eventful evening drew near, the little Mrs. Wygram assumed a more and more important air; for she had undertaken to superintend the domestic arrangements for the young artist; and she was in all his secrets; and very earnest were their confabulations together. But one afternoon she came home looking rather puzzled.

'Janie,' she said to her daughter, 'what is it about a falcon?'

'What falcon, mother?'

'I don't understand at all; but twice to-day he has said the same thing; you see, I was remonstrating with him about his extravagance; and really the way he is going on

is absurd ; oh, I assure you, there is nothing in Covent Garden half good enough ; I believe he would telegraph to the Brazils if there was time to get back the things. Well, I was saying how absurd it was, and that people did not expect such entertainments at a bachelor's house ; and then it was he said, " I wish there was nothing left but my falcon." And then again he said, " But when is the falcon to be brought in ? " And when I asked him what falcon, he only laughed and turned to something else.'

'Mother,' cried Janie, 'don't you know ? Don't you know the old Italian story ?'

The mother looked as puzzled as ever.

'Why, it has been told a hundred times. It was about a young gentleman of Florence who wasted all his wealth in giving entertainments to please his lady-love, but she did not care for him ; she married some one else ; and he went away into the country, very poor, and having nothing left him but his pet falcon. Then by and by she became a widow ; and she was living in the country, too ; and her little boy fell sick, and nothing would do but that he must have the falcon that he had seen flying over the neighbouring garden. So she went with another lady to the house, and there was her former lover, and he was greatly distressed that there was nothing in the house he could have cooked for them, for she had said that she would eat something. Do you understand now, mother ? He bade his servant go quickly and strangle the falcon—the last of all his

possessions—and that was cooked and brought in and set before them. And then, of course, when the lady made her request about the falcon, he had to confess what he had done in order to entertain her; and she was so much struck by his generosity that she fell in love with him, and married him. Have you never heard the story? The young gentleman's name was Federigo; and the lady's Monna Giovanna. And you may be sure that was what Mr. Lindsay meant, mother; and very certain I am that he would be content to part with everything he has, and to sacrifice pet falcon and everything else, if that would only win him his Monna Giovanna.'

'And who may she be?' the mother said demurely.

'Oh, of course, you don't know, mother! It would never enter your head—not for a moment—that it was our Sabie who is Mr. Lindsay's Monna Giovanna.'

'What fools men are!' the mother sighed.

'They may or they may not be; I don't know,' the daughter said valiantly; 'but I do know that if I were a man I should consider myself a fool if I were not in love with Sabie.'

And at length the great evening arrived; and everything had been done that the most anxious consideration could think of; and all that was wanting now was the presence of Sabina to irradiate the feast. As a matter of fact, she and Mrs. Wygram and Janie came rather late; all the others had assembled, and were idling away the time in the studio,

laughing and joking and examining the sketches; but Walter Lindsay was in the front of the house, by himself, and rather nervously waiting. Then there was the noise of a cab; the gate bell was rung; and the next moment he was outside and down through the little garden, just in time to receive them. This was rather a dusky thoroughfare; and the yellow gas lamps gave but little relief; but it seemed to him that when Sabina stepped out on to the pavement—so tall and queenly she was, and yet with such a frank and generous good nature in her face—that there was some kind of moonlight around. He had eyes only for her; he was a little bewildered; she seemed something radiant—here in the dusk.

'It is very kind of you to come,' he said; but he did not know what he was saying.

He accompanied them into the house; could this beautiful creature know how great a favour she was conferring by merely stepping within the door? And she smiled so graciously on the little maid who asked them to go into the improvised cloak-room: did she know that that too was a kindness?—that she could so easily make friends with her winning looks and her gentle manner? But at this moment Janie Wygram hung back from her companions, and said to him, in a half-whisper, 'Is the falcon being cooked?'

'There is no such luck for me,' said he; and then he added quickly, 'but do you think, now, that Miss

Zembra could be prevailed upon to take away some little trifle as a souvenir? There are all kinds of things in the studio—if you found her interested in any of them, could you give me a hint—anything, no matter what—anything in the house——'

'I don't know,' said Miss Janie; but she could not add another word then, for she had to follow her companions into the cloak-room.

Forthwith he sent word to have supper served as soon as possible; and when these new guests reappeared he would have them remain in the drawing-room. He seemed to forget the others whom he had left in the studio. It was Sabina whom he wanted to look at these sketches, and medallions, and miniatures, and what not; and so anxious was he to interest her, and so strangely did the magic of her presence affect him, that his fingers were not so steady as they might have been.

'Why, your hand shakes,' she said (for she was rather blunt-spoken on occasion). 'What is it? Too much Arts Club at midnight?'

It was a cruel speech, though it was not meant cruelly. How could he explain to her what it was that made his hand a trifle unsteady? Or how could he say to her that he would willingly never enter within the doors of the Arts Club again, if she but expressed the slightest wish on the subject?

'But your other friends, Mr. Lindsay?' said Mrs.

Wygram, who considered herself responsible for the proper conduct of the proceedings. 'Should we not go into the studio?'

'Oh no,' said he; 'they're all right. Borella is there; he will keep them lively enough.' In fact, they could hear the sound of a piano in the distance. 'That is another thing I wanted to warn you about, Miss Janie. Don't you keep insisting on encores. Borella is the best fellow in the world, but he is rather noisy, and he likes to monopolise the piano. Now when he wants to go, let him go; and then we shall have a nice quiet evening by ourselves.'

Of course, Miss Janie knew very well it was about Sabina he was thinking; perhaps she might not like too hilarious an evening; for there was something grave and serious in her manner, even with all its gracious sweetness.

Then came the butler (he was a butler only at night; by day he was an old-man model, and favourably known throughout the studios for his prominent nose and shaggy eyebrows: it should be said, moreover, that his ability in both capacities was marked, and that he could decant a bottle of port just as well as he could pose as an ancient Highland cateran, or a scowling miser, or a smiling grand-papa) to say that supper was served; and Mr. Lindsay escorted these three guests into the dining-room. It was a clever little scheme.

'Miss Zembra,' said he, 'will you take this seat, if you please? Mrs. Wygram has been so kind as to offer to take

the other end of the table—she can see that things are going on rightly—and—and the servants understand——'

It was a clever little scheme; for now, without fear of any mistake, Miss Zembra would be seated next him, and on his right hand also; and there awaiting her was the bouquet he had himself designed for her; while Mrs. Wygram, instead of being annoyed at not finding herself in the place of honour, considered herself promoted to the position of mistress of the feast. Janie Wygram smiled to herself, but said nothing; and with a light heart Walter Lindsay went away to summon his other guests from the studio.

It was a pretty scene at that supper-table when they had all come in and taken their places—the shining silver and the Venetian glass; the shaded candles shedding a soft roseate glow on the cover; the abundant flowers; the baskets of fruit; the faces of the young men and maidens growing blither as the talk became more and more animated. And if there was a trifle too much noise in the neighbourhood of the blackavised baritone—who was telling very, very old stories in half-intelligible English, and laughing boisterously at the same—well, that was all the more convenient for any of the quieter folk, who perhaps had their own little sentences (timid and hesitating, and hardly daring to say all that might be said) to communicate to each other in their small, separate sets. Walter Lindsay was not sorry to be able to murmur a word or two unheard by the general crowd, even if there was no particular secret

to be conveyed; it was something that he could speak to Sabina, as it were, alone. And then she was looking so beautiful this evening—so calm, and bland, and complaisant; and the gracious outline of her neck, as she bent forward a little to listen, was something to steal one's heart away. Her stepmother had said she was a dowdy in her dress. Well, on ordinary busy days she generally wore a tight-fitting gown of brownish-gray homespun, with a jacket to match; and her brown felt bonnet was serviceable enough; and if you had met her in Kensington High Street, or in Cromwell Road, you would have thought little of the costume, though perhaps her stature, and her gait, and the set of her head might have attracted a brief notice. But to-night there was naturally something different. She wore a dress of pale blue Indian silk, with a *fichu* of faintly yellow lace coming round the neck and bosom; and for sole ornament, where the *fichu* met the gown, there was a bunch of real forget-me-nots. Walter Lindsay looked at these from time to time. What falcon would he not have sacrificed to gain possession of any one of them?

And yet he had a little score to settle with her. If any other person had told him that he had a shaky hand, he would not have heeded much; besides such was not the case, for although he had the artist's temperament, and was exceedingly sensitive in many ways, his nerves were as sound as a bell. But that Sabina should have taunted him was too bad; and her reference to the Arts Club!

'Miss Zembra,' he made bold to say (but still in that undertone that he seemed to prefer), 'what did you mean by saying that my hand shook?'

'Did I?' she said, and she looked up. And then something in his manner appeared to amuse her. 'If I hurt your feelings, I am very sorry.'

'What did you mean by too much Arts Club at midnight?' said he, for he was determined to clear himself of the charge.

'I am a hospital nurse on occasion,' she said, laughing. 'I suppose I spoke professionally. But really, I did not mean anything serious, Mr. Lindsay — oh, of course not.'

'But I'm going to have it out with you,' said he. 'I want just to see whether you or I have the steadier hand ——'

'No, no; if I apologise to you——'

'But I want to see. Now just you lift your wine-glass and I will hold up mine, and we will see who can let them come closest without actually touching.'

Well, she was good-natured; they went through that little performance; and certainly both their hands now seemed steady enough.

'Can I do more than apologise?' she said, as she put down her glass again. 'I did not mean to offend you.'

'Offend me!' He looked at her; that was all.

Meanwhile, the robust baritone had chanced to catch

sight of that raising of glasses, and imagining that it was merely the revival of an old custom, he set to work at his end of the table, and presently there was a good deal of drinking of healths and clinking of glasses, with even an occasional '*Stosst an!—setzt an!—fertig!—los!* It was in the midst of this hubbub of chatter and merriment that Mrs. Wygram found an opportunity of saying to her daughter, who happened to sit next her:

'Janie, don't look up the table, but do you know what is going on? I can tell you. Are you aware that your darling Sabina is showing herself as nothing else than an outrageous flirt?'

'She is not, mother!' Janie said indignantly. 'She doesn't know what flirtation is!'

'It's a remarkable good imitation of it then that is going on up there,' said the little old lady, still with her eyes cast down. 'I've never seen anything worse anywhere. Why, Mr. Lindsay has not said a word to a soul since we sat down to supper; he has eyes and ears for nobody but her!'

'And whose fault is that?' said Janie; 'that is his fault, not hers. Of course, she is kind to him, as she would be to any one sitting in his place. It's little you know about Sabie if you think that of her.'

'I can use my eyes,' said Mrs. Wygram, 'and they're older than yours, my girl.'

'You know you're only saying that to vex me, mother;

and you can't do it. No, you can't; I know Sabie better than that.'

'At all events,' the mother said, to close this underhand discussion,—'at all events Mr. Lindsay is having one happy evening in his life.'

Nor was Mrs. Wygram the only one who was casually observant of what was going on at the upper end of the table. A tall, rather good-looking fellow—a recently elected Associate he was, and very proud of his new honours—said to his neighbour, who was a lively little maiden with a roseate face, a piquant nose, and raven-black hair, 'Who is the lady of the forget-me-nots?'

She glanced up the table.

'Oh, don't you know? That is Miss Zembra—a daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra—the Parliament man, don't you know? Pretty, isn't she?'

'How long have Walter Lindsay and she known each other?' he asked. There was some kind of significance in his tone.

'I think for some time,' said his companion. 'But I believe she has never been in his house before. She doesn't care for such things—nursing babies and old women is more in her line. It's all very well if they would only wash their faces.'

'Oh, they've known each other for some time?'

'I believe so.'

'Oh, they've known each other for some time?'

What did he mean by this repetition? What he was trying to do, at all events, was to get his companion to raise her eyes to his, to ask what his meaning was; but she was a shrewd little lass, and knew better than to be drawn into any such understanding.

'Well, I suppose it's none of my business,' he said finally; and that was a very sensible conclusion.

And now did Walter Lindsay call down the blessings of heaven on Borella's wildly-matted head; for the noisy baritone had taken to performing conjuring tricks, and the attention of every one at the table was directed towards him. And Sabina wished to look on also, for she loved amusement as well as any one, when the chance was there, but her companion would not let her. He was sure she had had no supper at all. A little more wine, then? for she seemed to like the perfume of that golden-clear *vino di Capri.* He was so sorry she had had no supper. It was a shame that she had come to his house merely to be starved; perhaps she would never come again, after such treatment? Some fruit, then, just to show that she had not been quite neglected? Not a slice of pine-apple, nor half a dozen grapes, even? Some strawberries, then?

'Grapes and strawberries in the middle of March?' she said, with a smile. 'Really, it is perfectly wicked.'

And then there was on his lips some wild reference to Ser Federigo's envied happiness in the destruction of his falcon, but fortunately he did not go so far; he contented

himself with engrossing her attention so that she could not see any of the conjuring; and he would have her tell him more of her experiences among the mudlarks down Lambeth way. Were they all so cynical? And not so grateful to her as they might be? Was she not afraid of having her pocket picked? And the one of them who was her champion and chief confidant—could he be found out now, by a stranger? Would he like to have a good, substantial, mid-day dinner given him, and thereafter a boat that he might sail on the ponds in Battersea Park, supposing that such an amusement were permitted?

Well, Sabina had a generous faculty of being pleased with whoever was talking to her for the moment; and he was her host, moreover, and all the others were occupied with their own affairs; so she had leisure to tell him about these and other things. And ever the glamour of her clear soft hazel eyes was working him further and further woe. Her rounded white arms were near him; the dimple in her cheek showed when she laughed; her beautiful brown hair was still more beautiful in the softened light. But these things were as nothing. It was her eyes he sought; and these were so friendly, and pleased, and benignant that who would have accused them of working him woe? Nor did he care. He drank the sweet madness, the fell poison, without stint, and recklessly and joyously; this night was to be at least one happy night in his life; he had Sabie all to himself—and he was drinking in her pleased

glances and her smiles as if they were strong wine; the years to come, whatever there might be in them, could never deprive him of that gold-and-rose-tinted memory.

At length the conjuring came to an end; and it was Herr Borella himself who suggested that they should go away into the studio to have a little music; he had to leave soon, he explained. And then there was a fetching of wraps for the womenfolk; and somehow Walter Lindsay managed to secure Sabina's long fur cloak; and he it was who put it round her shoulders, and would even insist that it was properly fastened at the throat, for the night was cold. When they went outside into the back garden, at the farther end of which was the studio, they found that the night skies had grown clearer, and stars were shining palely overhead. Sabina thought of the dark early morning in East London, and of her crossing from the nurses' dormitory to the wards; she was a little grave as the ghostlike procession passed along from the house, through this weird gloom, to the yellow light of the studio-door.

All within there, however, was brightness; the gas and candles lit; the fire burning briskly; the piano open; plenty of music scattered everywhere. The great baritone set to work at once; he was frank enough. He sang them 'O du, mein holder Abendstern' from *Tannhäuser*—a young lady in spectacles accompanying him; and then he himself sat down at the piano, and sang—

'Fern in die Welt,
Weit, weit von dir,
Strahlet dein Bild
Tief, tief in mir.'

One would scarcely have expected a man who had been so boisterous and uproarious at supper to sing with so much feeling; but the quality of his art was very fine indeed; more than one young woman there was rather lumpy about the throat when he finished. Then, after he had sung one or two more things, and bade such as he knew good-night, and lit a big cigar, and gone away, the young folks began on their own account; and as there happened to be lying open a volume of old-fashioned glees and madrigals and duets, they were soon in the midst of these. It was a careless, happy-go-lucky series of performances; when they broke down, they turned over the page to the next one; sometimes a newcomer would stroll over and give them a helping hand. But the young lady in spectacles knew her business, at all events; and so in one way or another they got along, with laughter and jests thrown in. Now it was 'Foresters, sound the cheerful horn,' or 'The chough and crow to roost are gone,' or 'Hark, the bonny Christ Church bells,' or 'Here's a health to all good lasses,' and again it was 'Chloe found Amyntas lying,' or

'Sigh no more, ladies; ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever.'

All this while Walter Lindsay was seated on a sofa with

Sabina as his sole companion. On coming into the studio he had perforce paid a little attention to his other guests; but once he had got them fairly started on this occupation, he had gone back to her—how could he help it? And Sabina sat and listened, her hands folded, her eyes pleased; she had the air of one looking on, rather than of one participating; but surely it was with no unkindly regard.

'How pretty that is!' she said, rather wistfully, on one occasion.

The tall young Associate was at the piano; and it was his neighbour at supper who had now taken the place of the spectacled young lady; and he was bending over the accompanist, so that their heads were very near together—his a fair chestnut-brown, hers a raven-black. And they were singing—with a careless bass thrown in by a gentleman standing opposite the fire—

> '*Tell me, shepherds, have you seen*
> *My Flora pass this way.*'

'Yes, it is a pretty air,' Walter Lindsay said.

'Ah, but I did not mean that,' Sabina said, in her low voice. 'It is the picture that looks so pretty—the two young people together, and singing——'

And why, asked Lindsay of himself, should she look and speak so wistfully? Was she not herself young and more beautiful than any? Was she to be for ever a spectator? Did she regard herself as one cut off from the

amusements, the associations, the hopes of young people? And where was the need of any such sacrifice?

'*Tell me*,' warbled the young lady at the piano—'*Tell me!*' roared the basso at the fireplace—'*Shepherds, have you seen*,' struck in the young Associate, who had a very fair tenor voice; but Lindsay did not heed them; he was thinking of Sabina, and of her way of life, and of her future. And if he was bold enough to consider how easy it would be for her to give him one of those forget-me-nots? Well, if that wild fancy crossed his mind, it was but for a moment. He was far away from that, and he knew it. But why should he fret? Sabina was here, and by his side; and she was bland and smiling and kind; and ever he drank fresh draughts of bewildering gladness and madness from the shining beauty of her eyes.

By this time the black-haired maiden at the piano had had enough of duets and glees.

'Go and get up a dance,' she said, in her imperative way, to her companion; and as the young painter dutifully obeyed, she began to play the slow and gracious music of a minuet. However, it was no minuet that was in the young lady's mind. She only wished in that way to introduce the idea of dancing. As soon as the easels and chairs and couches had been removed, and the young men were choosing their partners, she started off with 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' and that at a rattling pace.

'Will you join them?' Walter Lindsay said to his companion.

'I think I would rather look on,' Sabina answered.

'Then give me the dance, and we will sit it out together,' said he.

She nodded and smiled; that was more to her liking.

'Will you give me them all on the same terms?' said he quickly. 'I don't wish to dance.'

But she did not answer this; she was looking on with interest at the formation of the two long lines.

And so Lindsay and this fell enchantress were left together again; and, as the wild romp in the middle of the floor went on, he was telling her all about his work and his plans for the summer (in answer to her questions, of course), and he was describing to her the secret sylvan haunts he knew, and the remote little inns he stayed at, and so forth; and as all this naturally led up to his drawings and sketches, he took her away into a corner to show her a big portfolio of these. And meanwhile he was forming a dark design in his brain. When the 'Sir Roger de Coverley' ended, he withdrew from her side for a moment.

'Percy,' he said to the tall young painter, 'get up a cotillon.'

'Don't know how.'

'Oh yes, you do,' was the hurried rejoinder. 'Anybody will show you. Do, like a good fellow—and look sharp!'

And then he was back at her side again. Now, in the

corner where the portfolio was, there stood a triangular Chippendale cabinet, filled with various kinds of *bric-à-brac*, and amongst these—and the gem of the collection—was a small chalice of rock-crystal, elaborately studded round with uncut stones of diverse colours. In itself it was a most beautiful thing; besides which it was obviously of great age and value. Sabina was looking in at these shelves with a woman's curiosity.

'Do you know what that dance is?' he asked of her.

She glanced over her shoulder carelessly.

'No.'

'It is a cotillon,' said he, rather breathlessly. 'And you gave it me, you know.'

'Did I?' said she, with something of an amused look; what could it matter whether she had made this useless promise or not?

'Oh yes, you did,' he said eagerly. 'We are in it, if we choose. And do you know what the peculiarity of this dance is?—that you are allowed to make your partner a little present. Oh, I assure you it is so—and—and this is what I want you to accept from me.'

He opened the cabinet, and took out the jewel-bestudded wine-cup. Sabina rather shrank back.

'Oh no, oh no,' she said. 'You are very kind—but—but I have no place to keep such things—besides, I could not take it—Mr. Lindsay, please be good enough not to ask me.'

Her eyes were earnest; and they could make him do anything. But he was unsatisfied and anxious and a little bit reckless, perhaps.

'Then, if you will not take, will you give?' he made bold to say, but under his breath. 'Miss Janie says that is more in your way. And if I ask a favour of you? You will not take this little cup: well, you could make it thirty times more valuable to me if you would drink something out of it. Will you?'

She looked surprised, but not offended; she did not quite understand.

'Why, what difference will that make?' she said. But before she had finished the words he had gone away over to a little *buffet* that Mrs. Wygram was improvising for the dancers, and the next moment he had returned with a bottle of wine in his hand. He poured a little of the foaming fluid into the chalice, and offered it to her.

'Is it a ceremony?' Sabina asked, with a smile, and she took the chalice from him.

'Yes, it is part of the dance,' he answered, glad of any excuse that would obtain for him this gracious favour.

'Do I say anything? Do I wish anything?' Sabina asked.

'I will do the wishing,' he answered quickly; and then she raised the wine-cup to her lips, and drank a little, and then gave it back to him. He could only look his thanks.

Mrs. Wygram's eyes had followed him across the room.

'And what do you think of your Sabie now?' she exclaimed to her daughter, who was assisting her.

'Just the same as ever—why?' was Janie's answer.

'You did not see what she did just now?'

'No.'

'Well, then, I'll tell you; she drank out of that crystal wine-cup just to please him, I suppose, and he put it back in the cabinet!'

'And why shouldn't she?' said Janie bravely. 'To please him?—very well. She would do that or anything else to please any man, woman, or child who happened to be there. Mother, what has set you all of a sudden against Sabie? You know it's just her universal kindness.'

'Kindness!' said the mother, with a gentle sarcasm. 'Perhaps it is. But I have never seen a more abominable piece of flirtation in all my born days.' And with that she went to bid the model-butler bring some more lemonade and seltzer water; for the young lady at the piano had begun to play a wild Highland schottische, and Mrs. Wygram had enough experience of these scratch parties to know what that meant.

They kept up the merry-making to a very early hour indeed; but after Sabina and the Wygrams had taken their departure, Lindsay did not seem to heed much what was going forward. And at last he was left alone—in this big studio—with the *disjecta membra* of the revels all around him; and he sat him down to think over everything

that had happened during that eventful evening, even to the smallest details wherever Sabina had been concerned.

And so Ser Federigo had not sacrificed his falcon after all—though his offer of the jewelled chalice was a little tentative effort in that direction. No; so far from his being poorer by her coming to his house, he was ever so much the richer; that was like Sabina, as the faithful Janie would have maintained. The whole of this big studio seemed saturated with the charm and wonder of her presence. Here she had sat, her hands folded in her lap, talking to him in her softly-modulated voice; there she had stood, her beautiful neck bent over the drawings and sketches, her praise and admiration frank and ready enough; it was by the side of that easel she had taken the wine-cup—now a hundred times more precious to him than it had been before—into her gentle hand, and raised it, and touched the rim with her proudly-cut lips, and given it him back with so gracious a smile. He was beginning to understand her now. If you said, 'Take!' her answer was 'No;' if you said 'Give!' her answer was 'Yes.' But all through these visions and recalling of visions it was her eyes that chiefly he saw; and they were regarding him somehow; and always they were pleased and generous and benignant towards him. He made no effort to banish the memory of that look.

CHAPTER VI

TO BRIGHTON

SABINA was unused to late hours and late suppers. Next morning she found herself less brisk than was her wont; and so, having despatched Janie Wygram on certain errands down in the Chelsea direction, she thought she would take a longer walk than usual, and go round by Hyde Park on her way to Lancaster Gate. And very soon the fresh air revived her. It was one of those sudden springlike days that occasionally show themselves in March; a bland south wind was blowing; the Serpentine was shimmering in silver; the pale brown roads dividing the level breadths of green-sward looked pleasant enough in the warm sunlight; and every leafless branch of the elms and maples was defined sharp and black against the blue sky. There was a kind of happy murmur all around, and a look of life and animation amongst the nondescript crowd. Carriages rolled by with their occupants wrapped in their winter furs; nursemaids were chatting as they pushed before them the somnolent perambulator; charming young horsewomen were walking side by side, and perchance exchanging confidences about

the last night's ball; children were calling, dogs scampering, sparrows twittering; everywhere there was life and motion and sound—and it was a sound as of gladness, somehow.

And, of course, Sabina thought of the poor young fellow who was shut out from all this, and kept a close prisoner there; and her heart was filled with pity for him; and half-unconsciously she walked as quickly as she could, so as to give him as soon as possible the solace of her companionship. It is true—though she did not like to confess it to herself—that she had begun to suspect of late that he was not quite so grateful for her society, and her efforts to amuse him, as he might be. He seemed to be very well content with the sporting papers, and with the less officious conversation of the professional nurse. Perhaps, then, she—that is, Sabina—bored him somewhat? Perhaps he did not want to be bothered with the formality of talking to a young lady? Perhaps he might even consider her a little bit of a nuisance? Sabina did not like to dwell on these questions, because they sounded like pique; and, of course, it did not matter to her whether he was grateful for her volunteered companionship or not.

On this morning she found him in very gay spirits indeed; a number of things contributing. First of all, Schiller had won the Shipley Hall Handicap on the previous Tuesday, and Mr. Fred Foster was now in ample funds; but this she knew, for she had been the gainer by that victory of ten pounds. Then, again, the horse that he had backed for the

Lincolnshire Handicap, at 20 to 1 against, had quite suddenly risen in popular estimation and was now first favourite at 100 to 12; and here was a fine opportunity for a little business! But the chief and glorious news was that the doctor had consented to his removal; and arrangements were now being made for his being conveyed to Brighton.

'Do you know Brighton, Miss Zembra?' he said eagerly. 'Oh, I do, I can tell you; I know it just down to the ground. I shan't want for amusement. You see, I'll have rooms in the King's Road; they shouldn't be very expensive at this time of the year; and I can be wheeled out to the end of the West Pier like the other cripples, and read the papers, and listen to the band. Then there's a telegraph-office at the foot of the Pier if one wants to do a little business. Then there's the tennis court; they'll let me look on, I suppose. Then the billiard-rooms; but I suppose they wouldn't like my hearse brought in there. When I can sport about in a bath-chair, however, I know one shop where I shall be welcome enough. And, then, the fellows I know are always running down to Brighton—to the Old Ship; I should hear what was going on; they won't leave me out in the cold. I'm not likely to be tempted like the ordinary stay-at-home backer, to try a system——'

'A system?' she said with inquiring eyebrows.

'Well, a system is a machine for making it certain that you drop your money—that's all,' he explained. 'But

why should I bore you with such things—you don't understand. And you seem a little bit tired this morning, Miss Zembra.'

She told him something of the festivities of the night before; and said that though they were mild enough, she was not used to them, and confessed to being a trifle fagged.

'That kind of thing would not suit me at all,' he said frankly. 'I like to keep myself fit all the way round—fit for a steeplechase course, or a thousand up at billiards, or a pigeon-shoot, or anything. Now, I'll tell you the kind of feast I like—a breakfast at Jem Saker's—Saker, the trainer, you know. Well, now, that is the prettiest thing that I have any acquaintance with; Mrs. Saker, buxom and fresh as a daisy, at the head of the table; an excellent breakfast; fried soles done to a turn; bacon crisp and hot from the fender, a devilled kidney or two, and the best coffee in the world. Then, as you're forging ahead, you may chance to glance out of the window, and there is a string of horses marching past on their way to the heath; and just as like as not you'll hear Mrs. Saker say, "Well, I for one don't object to seeing the touts coming about; it shows they think we have some horses worth watching." After a breakfast like that, I'm fit for the day; I can do without anything else all day long; there's never any "sinking" bothers me.'

'You ought to be very thankful you have such a constitution,' Sabina said; she could not help noticing the

clearness of his complexion, where the sun-tan still lingered, and also the brilliant liquidness of his eyes, which were like those of a schoolboy in the briskest of health.

'It's just luck,' said he in his usual saturnine fashion. 'I happened to be born like that! I might have been one of those miserable devils who can't go on for a couple of hours without a sherry and bitters. I don't blame them, but I'd rather be as I am.'

'And when do you go to Brighton?' Sabina asked; it occurred to her then that the house would become strangely empty and uninteresting when he was gone.

'As soon as my *catafalque* is got ready,' he said with cheerful good humour. 'And I shall be precious glad to get there. Not entirely on my own account—I'm afraid you must think me an awfully selfish brute, don't you?—no, it's partly on account of the Mater. You see, as soon as I can date my letters from Brighton, she will be convinced that nothing very serious has happened. I have been mortally afraid of the old lady turning up in London, and getting alarmed when she found I wasn't in Bury Street. As for my father, I suppose he's disappointed that I haven't broken my neck. He has been prophesying these dozen years back that that would be the end of me; and people like their prophecies to come off, you know.'

'It has been bad enough as it is,' said Sabina; 'but I am sure you have borne your imprisonment so far with very great courage. Most men would have fretted and com-

plained, and found the forced idleness almost unendurable. I hope you will never have such an experience again; but I must say you make an admirable patient.'

Now, surely, here was an opportunity for him to show himself a little grateful to the young lady who had given him so much of her time and attention. It could have been easily done; nay, was there not almost an invitation in what she had said? But he did not seem to take it that way. He humorously remarked that he hoped soon to be about again, but that he would take care not to challenge John Roberts junior to play 3000 up for a considerable time to come.

There were one or two questions of some delicacy arose ere he could take his departure for Brighton.

'You know, Miss Zembra,' he said, in his usual matter-of-fact way, 'I am quite aware that your people have wished me at Jericho ever since I came into the house; and I don't want to be indebted to people who wish me at Jericho; at the same time I should be sorry to offend you by offering to pay for my board.'

'Please, we will not speak of it,' said Sabina.

'It's an awkward time of the year—if I could send them some game——'

He saw that he only vexed her, and he dropped the subject; privately reserving to himself the right of bountifully tipping the servants, for he was in ample funds at the moment.

Sabina, on her side, found herself quite unable to induce either her father or Lady Zembra to say a word of farewell to their unbidden and unwelcome guest. She represented to them what a gross discourtesy their omitting to do so would be to a man who was distinctly a gentleman; and that even common humanity demanded that they should be well-disposed to one who had suffered injury through a member of the family. But no; Sir Anthony, when he had said a thing stuck to it; and he had declared he would have nothing whatsoever to do with this stranger; and Lady Zembra was only too glad to escape from bother by following the example of her lord. Sabina tried to make some little explanation and apology to Mr. Fred Foster himself; but that young gentleman only laughed good-naturedly, said he understood the whole situation, and that, in their position, he would have been precisely in the same state of mind.

Both Janie Wygram and Sabina went to Victoria Station to see him off; and then it was that Janie saw him for the first time.

'He does not seem much of an invalid,' said Janie, aside, observing his sun-browned complexion and clear blue eyes.

'Poor fellow,' Sabina said; 'just imagine what it must be for one who has led so active a life to be chained down like that. And the doctor says it may be months before he can walk about. I have never seen any one so patient and cheerful.'

'I should have thought he was quick-tempered by the colour of his hair; carroty curls always go with a short temper,' said Janie, who had not forgotten her grudge against this luckless young man.

However, Sabina did not reply to this remark; for she had to step into the carriage to bid Mr. Foster good-bye.

'You won't forget to let me know how you get on at Brighton?' said she.

'Why should I bother you?' he said.

'But I particularly wish to know, and as often as it is convenient,' she persisted. 'You can't imagine how glad I shall be when I hear that you are getting about again, and shaking off the last traces of that dreadful accident.'

'Oh, very well,' said he. 'But don't you bother about me. I shall soon be skipping about again like a two-year-old.'

'Good-bye,' she said, and she gave him her hand.

'Good-bye, Miss Zembra,' said he, and he added, 'you know you've been awfully kind to me. I wish I knew how to repay you. If you were a man, I could.'

'Indeed!' she said lightly, for she guessed there was some small joke in his mind.

'Yes, I could. I'd advise you to put every penny you have in the world on Cherry Blossom for the Grand National.'

The train was already moving; she had to step quickly

back; and then she waved her hand to him from the platform.

'Poor fellow,' she said, almost to herself; 'half of his cheerfulness is only pretence. He feels it more than he would have any one think.'

And Janie looked at her with a curious glance; then they turned and left the station together, and in silence.

CHAPTER VII

BY THE SHANNON SHORE

For ordinary love-sickness there is no more prompt and efficacious cure than marriage; but for the heart-ache begotten of hopeless love, where is the cure? It is a disease that people are for the most part ashamed of; they conceal it assiduously; and therefore it may be assumed to be more prevalent than appears. Walter Lindsay, at all events, could find no cure, though he tried many. For he was inordinately vexed with himself that in walking along High Street, Kensington, he could not see a tall woman in the distance without his heart leaping up with some wild hope that it might be Sabina. And why, each time that he went home, was there a great disappointment for him on finding there no letter from Janie Wygram, with some chance mention of Sabina in it? Janie Wygram could not keep continually writing to him *à propos* of nothing. The most serious interests of his life were interfered with by this agony of vague unrest; his work was done now, not for the world, that was willing enough to welcome it, but that it might perchance win for him a smile

of Sabina's approval. And as for the hopelessness of his passion—well, he had not studied her every gesture and look, he had not listened to Janie's minute and intimate description of her ways of life, and her hopes, and opinions, and interests, all for nothing; and well he knew that marriage formed no part of Sabina's plans for the future. She was very kind to him—for she was kind to everybody; and if he were ill, he thought she might be sorry; and for the passing hour—as had happened the other evening—she would smile on him, and be generous, and gracious, and bland. But as for anything more? He knew he might as well think of going into the National Gallery and asking some fair-browed Madonna to step down from her frame, and take his hand, and go through the years of life with him.

And then he would try to argue himself out of this insanity of love. He had set up an impossible ideal, he maintained to himself. No woman could be so fine as that. Why should he bother his head about a phantom of his own creation? Women were women; he knew what they themselves said and wrote of each other; he was no longer a boy, imagining everything that wore a petticoat to be an angel. And then he would resolve to go again to Janie Wygram, and get to know something about the real Sabina, who must have her faults and weaknesses and vanities like other folk. Alas! that was not of much avail. Janie quietly remarked that people might say what

they liked about women in general; it was none of her business; but she knew what Sabina was; nay, more, she did not scruple to declare to him, as she had already declared to her mother, that were she a man, she would consider herself a fool if she were not in love with Sabie. And so there was no hope for him that way either (not that he was so anxious to dethrone his idol, as he tried to persuade himself that he was); and as Sabina haunted every moment of his life, and came between his every occupation and project and fancy, he began to think that something must be done. He would go away from this hateful Kensington and see whether some of this love-sickness could not be left behind. He would seek out one of his favourite solitudes, and bury himself in that secret place, and devote himself to assiduous work, or assiduous recreation, he cared not which. To leave London—to miss the chance of catching a glimpse of her—to miss the chance even of hearing her name mentioned in the talking of friends—was not pleasant; but to remain in London suffering this useless torture was intolerable. So one morning, and on a sudden impulse, he telegraphed over to a friend in the west of Ireland, asking whether a place could be found for him on a certain stretch of the Shannon; the answer bade him come forthwith; and that afternoon he packed up his sketching implements and fishing-rods, went down by the night-mail to Holyhead, and was in Dublin in the morning.

He had come either to work or to play; there were to be no more foolish love-fancies. And so, as he sat in that railway carriage hour after hour, and was taken away across Ireland, he kept studying the ever-varying and yet monotonous features of the landscape, and the slowly-changing effects of light. And lucky it was for him that he was a painter. Anybody else would have found that solitary journey a somewhat dismal thing, and the melancholy April day not a little depressing. The leafless trees looked black and harsh amid the raw reds and greens of ploughed land and fallow; and the long stretches of bog, with here and there a few cottages and stone walls and miserable enclosures, were not very cheerful under these cold and neutral-tinted skies. That is to say, the ordinary traveller would have found those skies neutral-tinted and characterless enough; but this man was a painter; and he could find quite sufficient technical interest in regarding the softly-shaded bulk and retreating perspective of the larger masses of cloud, and in tracing here and there a tinge of golden-white among the pale, hopeless, and yet pearly and ethereal blues and grays. And, during all this observation and studying of forms and tones and 'values,' he was determined that his heart should not go away wandering back to Kensington Square and Sabina Zembra.

In the afternoon he reached his destination, a straggling little town on the banks of the Shannon, the swift-rushing waters of which noble river are here spanned by a long and

many-arched bridge. He had telegraphed for rooms to the inn, where he was well known; and having deposited his things there, and picked out a handy little trout rod, he walked down to the river to have an hour's careless fishing and a general look round. This was a picturesque neighbourhood into which he had come; but the afternoon was not favourable; what wind there was was easterly, and that had drank the colour out of the hills around, that loomed high and lurid as mountains through the mist. However, there was always the magnificent river, with its surging rapid masses of white-tipped waves, and the pleasant sound of the rushing over the weir; while eventually a sort of coppery-red sunset broke through the pall of gray. But he was anxious about neither painting nor fishing on this first evening; and so he idly walked back to the inn again and to dinner in the small sitting-room, where the faithful Nora had not forgotten to build for him a big fire of turf instead of coal.

This Nora was an old friend of his; and as she came and went during dinner they had a little talking together. She was a large-limbed creature of a lass, with pretty soft eyes, and black hair that might have been more tidily kept, and hands that might have been more frequently washed. But she was friendly, and obliging, and pleasant-mannered; and her amiable disposition towards the young English artist was manifested in a hundred little ways. She it was who never neglected to fill his flask before he started in the

morning; and she was the last to wish him good luck as he left; and she sent him very nice things for lunch; and she was the first to congratulate him if the men appeared in the evening bringing a big salmon, or perhaps two, or perhaps three, with them; and when he came home empty-handed the pretty Nora would say, almost with tears in her voice, 'Well, it's sorry I am, sir; what a shame ye didn't get nothin' all the day long.' *Alanna machree* he called her, and *Mavourneen*, and *Nora astore*, and a great many other things of the meaning of which he knew very little. But Nora took all these with a placid good humour, and her friendliness was always perfectly within bounds.

'Sure, sir,' she said to him this evening, as he was getting to the end of his dinner, 'it's manny's the time we've been thinking you'd be bringing Mrs. Lindsay over wid ye, sir.'

'If you wait for that day, you'll wait all your life, Nora, my darling,' he answered.

'Ah, don't say that, sir!' responded Nora cheerfully. 'Sure there's plenty of pretty young ladies in London.'

'I suppose there are,' said he.

And instantly something in his manner told the sharp-witted Nora that she had struck a wrong chord, and she quickly changed the subject.

'Will ye have any pudding, sir?' she asked; here she could not go wrong.

'What kind of a pudding is it, Nora?'

'"Tis an apple-poy, sir.'

'Oh yes, that'll do.'

And it may have fancifully occurred to him in his idle musings, as this gentle-mannered handmaiden came and went, that if Nora were only to brush her hair and wash her hands, and get nicely dressed and smartened up, she would make a very presentable bride; and what if he were to induce her to go away to America—to the west, where he would buy a farm, and they would lead a healthy, happy, matter-of-fact existence—so that he should forget his sorrows, and think of that hated Kensington no more? But no; that would not do either. He might not find the forgetfulness he was in search of. Besides, her hair—each time she came into the room he noticed it—was too dreadfully untidy. And, then again, it was just possible that the Lass of Limerick (this was another of the names he gave her) might not care to go.

By and by, when Nora had removed the dinner things, and brought him some coffee, and stirred up the peats, he was left quite alone, and he pulled in his chair to the blazing fire, and lit his pipe. So far he had done well. He had scarcely sent one backward thought towards London the whole day long. But now there was this to be considered. He had promised to paint for Sabina a replica of the water-colour drawing she had chanced to admire; and he had understood from Janie that Miss Zembra was willing to accept the same. But replicas were more or less

mechanical things; besides, he had not the drawing here. Would it not be better, before setting seriously to work, that he should do some sketch for her—of some actual living scene? A first fresh impression was always preferable. She had shown a little interest in asking him about the various remote corners that he went to; here was one. Would she care for a sketch of the wide waters of the Shannon, the long bridge, the little straggling town, the old square-towered church, and, overlooking all, the distant slopes and shoulders of the Slieve Bernagh hills? It would not be recalling him to her recollection; it would be redeeming a promise. And might he not write to Janie—now—and make the suggestion?

It was a pretty long letter that he wrote to Janie. And if at first he pretended that all his concern was about that picture arrangement, in the end he was quite candid, and even glad to make Janie once more his confidante.

'The truth is,' he wrote, 'I came here to try to shake off certain influences—or rather, one particular influence—that you are aware of, I daresay. And to you, who see so much of Miss Zembra, and know what she is, I am not ashamed to confess that it may be difficult; but I hope to succeed in the end; and then, when this glamour of fascination has been got rid of, I hope to meet her on the more durable basis of friendship, if she will permit of that. Of course a young woman, and especially a beautiful young woman, may naturally distrust any such proposal; but fi

ever the need should arise, she would find that it was no fair-weather friendship I had begged her to accept. It would not be merely while her physical beauty lasted that I should be at her service, at any moment, if trouble came. To me, Sabina (I may call her this in confidence, and you will burn this letter) will always be beautiful, even when her eyes have lost that lustre that at present is just a little too bewildering for some unhappy mortals. You have helped me to understand what this is; and the friendship of such a splendid creature would mean more to me than I can well tell you. I suppose nothing else is possible. You say so; and you ought to know. At the same time, I am aware that you don't wish her to marry anybody; and that, if it were a matter of advice, that is the advice you would give her. Now, let me warn you, dear Miss Janie, that you have not seen very much of the world; and that to give advice in such a serious matter to any one involves a grave responsibility. It is all very well just now. Sabina is young and vigorous, self-confident in the audacity of her health and good spirits, and happy enough in shedding the bounty of her generous disposition upon all comers. But it cannot be always so. She cannot be always so. She might want a helping hand; she is away from her family; sickness might overtake her; she might get robbed of her good looks—which are an easy passport just now to everybody's favour. In any case, she must inevitably grow old. Is it wise to ask such a woman to face the coming years

alone? You know better than any one how sensitive she is, though she pretends not to be; how eager she is that people should like her; how she seems to crave for sympathy and affection. Well, I'm not going to rave about her any more, for you would think it was all special pleading; but you just be careful, dear Miss Janie, not to do any mischief where the lifelong interests of your best and dearest friend are concerned. If she will go that way, it is well. Each human being has his or her own ideal, I suppose. And anyhow, I'm going to try to banish all this mystification and glamour out of my head; and when I come back to London, I hope to be able to understand what Sabina really is—and no doubt she is a great deal finer than any of my imaginings about her; and you will help us to become good, true friends, and so make a satisfactory end of the whole matter. And I'm going to send your mother a salmon, as soon as I catch one.'

It was a very sensible letter, to be written by a man whose brains had got so thoroughly bewildered; and no doubt at the moment he believed every word he had written. But as he sat there later on, staring into the fire, perhaps some other visions may have arisen before him—only, it is not necessary they should be put down here.

Next morning he was all alert; the boatmen were waiting outside; the long Castle Connel rods had been put together; Nora had filled his flask—just in case there

might be occasion to drink 'a tight line to your honour;' and, presently, when he had bundled his sketching implements together, they were all on their way down to the boat. This was a very excellent recreation for a landscape painter (as well he knew before); for when once the coble, or 'cot,' was out in the midst of the wild-whirling waters, the men not only managed that, but the fishing as well; trolling—'dragging,' as they called it—with prawn and 'killoch' and phantom minnow, or lashing the stream with a forty-yard line, and a big gold and red and purple Shannon fly, as the occasion demanded; while he, if he chose, could sit idle, studying effects of light and colour and form, or jotting these down in his book, when he was so inclined. And then again, when the light was bad, or the part of the river they happened to be at uninteresting, he would get up and take the casting rod and have a turn at the throwing; and if the forty yards were now reduced to twenty-five, still that was not a bad line for an amateur to throw out clean. On this particular morning he was less interested in the fishing than usual; all his concern was to find something fine for the sketch he was to send Sabina. And how would that do, now? The built-up bank all ablaze with golden gorse; above that a row of leafless trees against a sky of pale lurid blues and faint red-grays; and underneath the bank, and all in front of him, the rushing, boiling, surging river, here and there straight, swift rapids, here and there masses of foam-crested waves,

and here and there a large, circular eddy of black, oily-looking smooth water, on which were reflected, in wan and spectral fashion, the whitewashed walls of an old, dilapidated mill. He looked at it again, this way and that, but it would not do. The east wind had withered the colour out of the landscape; this furious river was too difficult for a mere sketch; he wanted a blue sky on the water, instead of those reflections of gray and black. So he gave that up for the present, and took the rod from Johnnie Ryan, and began to belabour the whirling currents with five and twenty yards of line and a big 'silver doctor.'

In the afternoon he was more fortunate. For although that weird haze still hung over the lurid blue hills and the ghostly landscape, and the sun, when the clouds slowly parted, showed himself a sphere of mottled dusky gold, by and by, as the evening drew on, a beautiful pinky-gray light began to shine in the western heavens; and the stems and branches and twigs of the leafless trees grew to be of a rich warm purple; and the dark green of the grass on the bank and the deep yellow of the gorse became strangely intense and clear.

'Put me ashore now, Johnnie,' he said to the chief boatman.

'Sure 'tis the best bit of the bate we're just coming to,' Johnnie remonstrated.

'Very well; you fire away, and pick up a forty pounder. I'm going ashore—look alive now!'

And perhaps he was a little anxious as he began, and half-forgetful of his own mastery of his craft. He was so anxious to justify himself in Sabina's eyes. She had not seen much of his work; nor had any one in fact. His Wigtonshire patrimony had relieved him from the necessity of labouring for the market; and his reputation, which was distinct and marked, prevailed chiefly among artists themselves, who were wont to become very enthusiastic indeed about Walter Lindsay's drawings. Of course there were those who decried his method, and called him an Impressionist, and the like. And he was an Impressionist of a kind; but his Impressionism was of the higher order that refuses to deal with that which is unnecessary, not the Impressionism which is chiefly marked by a clever avoidance of difficulties. He began by being a realist of the severest type; for years he had laboured in Switzerland, in Sweden, in Holland at patient and faithful studies of rocks and foliage and water and sky; but gradually he had emancipated himself. Nature was no longer his master and tyrant; he chose for himself; he left undone what he did not think worth doing; but what he did do was done with the reverence born of knowledge. Nature was his friend and companion, if no longer his master; and hitherto he had been well content to wander away by himself into any kind of a solitude, working sometimes, idling sometimes, but always more or less unconsciously studying; and if he was not scrupulous about detail, where he did put in detail it

was right. He was none the worse a painter that he was also a trained geologist, and that his herbarium was of his own collection, and bore record of many a toilsome pilgrimage.

And now he began to pick up his courage again, for the effect proved lasting, and he was getting on. The beautiful ethereal rose-grays still dwelt in the higher heavens; the leafless trees grew even warmer in their purple; and the gorse bushes burned gold in the pallid shadow of the bank. He glanced at Johnnie Ryan from time to time; for Johnnie was fighting a salmon farther down the stream, and he wanted to see the end of that struggle. And then he wondered whether Sabina would care for this bit of a sketch. It was not of the chromo-lithographic kind; it was not striking; moreover, a good deal of compromise was necessary even with what was before him. But he thought he could make something out of it ultimately—a tender kind of a thing; not strong in colour, perhaps; rather ethereal and delicate, but if possible luminous and fine. He hoped Sabina would like it. Would she understand the reticence of it? Would she understand what had made him hold his hand somewhat? Of course, he could do the other thing if he chose. But it was something in the nature of a pearl that he wished to give to Sabina.

He carried out the sketch as far as was possible in the circumstances, until the rose hue in the sky began to fade into dusk; and then he bundled up his things, fairly well

content. And Johnnie Ryan and his companion had got the salmon—a twenty-two pounder—and they were also well content. He let the two men go on before him; and then, after sitting there a while considering what he could do further with the sketch, and perhaps thinking of one or two other things, he rose and walked slowly home by the river-bank, underneath a twilight made transparent by a single star.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW FRIENDSHIP

Of a sudden all this was changed; for the next morning the wind was blowing freshly from the west; and the world was ablaze with colour—rich and glowing and keen; and from that moment forward every day as it went by was filled to overflowing with brisk work, and recreation quite as brisk. When he had done a sufficient quantity of the former, he fell upon the latter with might and main; and flogged those surging rapids of the Shannon with a persistency and skill that won even the approval of Johnnie Ryan. And the evenings?—well, the evenings were given over now to the glorification of friendship. That was to be the future happiness. He would go back to London cured of the 'cruel madness of love,' and ask that beautiful, high-gifted creature to give him of her companionship, as far as that might be possible. He would prove the faith that was in him too. Others might try to woo and win her; he would be her friend, no matter what befell. He had heard of such things, and the situation might become fine in its way. And so he worked hard, and fished hard, and

bade himself be of good cheer; he had banished that morbid love-sickness by main force; Sabina was to be his friend.

There came a large envelope containing a couple of cards for the Private View of the Royal Academy. A week or two previous he had received the honour of an invitation to be present at the Banquet; this was an additional compliment, and highly pleased was he with both. But, of course, his first thought was of Sabina; and as he guessed that old Mr. Wygram would as usual have received a similar couple of tickets (this was a friendly act on the part of the Academy towards one who was not now as prosperous as once he had been), and as he knew that Mrs. Wygram and Janie invariably made use of these, he at once telegraphed to Miss Janie that he had a card for Miss Zembra if she cared to go, and also begging her to fix the engagement. That meant, naturally, that he should escort the three ladies to Burlington House, and show them round the rooms. But it was all in the way of friendship.

Next morning he said casually to the Lass of Limerick, 'Nora, what do you think now would be a nice present for a young lady?'

'Sure a sweetheart mightn't be amiss, sir,' said Nora demurely, as she was putting the eggs on the table.

'Ah, you're too facetious, Nora, alannah, for one of your tender years. How about a salmon, now? What if I were to send the young lady a salmon?'

'She'd be mighty plased, sir, I suppose,' said Nora, as she was heaping some more turf on the fire.

'But the fish ought to be of my own catching—don't you think so?'

'And maybe it's herself you'd rather be afther, sir, begging your pardon,' said Nora, darting a glance at him from the door.

'Nora,' said he gravely, 'is that the fashion they have of talking in Limerick?'

'It's the fashion they talk all over the wurruld, sir, when a young gentleman spakes about a young lady in that way—and that's the truth, sir,' said Nora, as she smiled maliciously and disappeared into the passage.

He was not to be deterred by the sarcasm of the Pride of Kildare (another of her names, by the way). This was a happy inspiration that he should send a salmon to Sabina. He did not stay to ask himself what she could do with it. Why, it was the right and privilege of every sportsman to make a present of game—salmon, or venison, or grouse, or whatever it might be—to whomsoever he chose, even to a stranger. Sabina would have the compliment; the Wygrams would have the fish. And surely this noble river, that he had made friends with, that he had come to know so well, that he had formed so great an affection for, would yield him a worthy prize? Anyhow, his colours, and block, and camp-stool, and sketching-umbrella were all left unheeded in a corner; and he was busy with minnows and prawns

and 'Jock Scotts' and 'Blue Doctors;' and forthwith he was on his way down to the coble with Johnnie Ryan and his mate.

And what a day this was for idleness, whether afloat or ashore! The spring seemed to have come upon them with a bound. The lilac and silver-white April skies were filled with blowing clouds; and now there were dazzling floods of light, and again the gloom of a passing shower; the yellow gorse burned hot in the sun; there were blush-tinted anemones in the leafless woods, and primroses everywhere, and shy violets; the swallows were skimming, and dipping, and twittering. A robin sang loud and clear from the topmost twig of a hawthorn bush. And then the splendid river, changing with every mood of the sky; at times sullen and dark under the heavy rainclouds; and then again, when these had passed, and the heavens were bountifully flooding the world with radiance, this great mass of water became a mighty highway of flashing, vivid, intense cobalt blue, lying between these soft green meadows and that high bank crowned with its golden furze.

'We ought to get a fish to-day, Johnnie,' he said, as he was flogging away at the water.

'Bedad, and it's more than one we'll have before going home this night, your honour,' was Johnnie's confident answer.

Moreover, the prophecy came true, for that evening, as they went home through the dusk, the men had three very

nice fish to carry, one of them weighing twenty-eight pounds; and it was the twenty-eight pounder, of course, that was to go to Kensington Square.

A twenty-eight pound salmon, a ticket for the Private View of the Academy, a water-colour drawing of a rose-gray evening over the beautiful river: these were the gifts he now had for Sabina; but they were not to show her that he was continually thinking of her; they were not to beg for her favour in any way; they were merely to cement the new friendship. All the same, he began to wonder why Janie had not written. He watched the posts. He tormented himself with doubts. Perhaps he had been too bold. Perhaps Sabina was ill. To think of her—while here he was in this blowing April weather, with the spring flowers carpeting the wood, and the west winds redolent of the full-blossomed gorse, and the great river shining back the deep blue of the young year's skies—to think of her as perchance in a dull room in that gray Kensington Square, lying pale and wan, it might be, with white fingers limp on the coverlet! Why was he not in London, that he might go straight to Janie and ask? If Sabina were ill, however slightly, small messages from the outside world might vary the monotony of the sick-room—flowers, and fruit, and books, and an occasional word of remembrance and sympathy—these could do no harm. Then again he would argue himself out of this fear. Sabina was very busy. Janie, too, had many things to look after. Perhaps she was waiting

to see whether Sabina could definitely fix about the Private View. Nevertheless, he came downstairs early in the morning lest there should be an envelope waiting for him on the breakfast-table. And sometimes he would leave the fishing just as the evening looked most promising, and wander back to the inn, hoping for an answer from Kensington Square. But all this anxiety, and needless alarm, and torturing speculation had nothing to do with love or love-sickness; it was but part of the newly-established friendship.

Nora was a good-hearted lass and shrewd withal; and she had got to suspect that Mr. Lindsay was troubling himself about the non-arrival of a letter; so that one day when the afternoon post brought a little batch of correspondence for him, she straightway sought out a small shock-headed boy and sent him down with the parcel to the boat. The letter from Janie had come at last, and eagerly enough it was opened. She apologised for not having answered sooner; but said she had been extremely busy. The young gentleman who had met with the accident had left Lancaster Gate; following that, Sabina had many arrears of her own particular work to attack, and Janie had been helping her. And as he read on remorse of conscience struck him. It appeared that his letter had very much distressed this tender soul. Any charge, however slight or remote, against her beloved Sabie, was a cause of deep concern to her; and she had got it into her head that Mr. Lindsay was rather hinting

that Sabina was impervious to the claims of friendship; and she considered this to be most especially ungrateful on his part.

'Don't think me impertinent, dear Mr. Lindsay,' she wrote, 'but really I cannot help asking what you would like more. You write as if you and Sabie were strangers; that you were coming back to beg for a little friendship from her; and that is all you have to say in return for the way she treated you that night at your house! Why, she just devoted herself to you the whole evening; and had scarcely a word or a look for any one else—so much so that it was remarked; and was as kind to you as an unmarried girl could be. I think you want a little too much, if I must speak my mind. If you think that Sabie is not already your friend, I can only say that you are *very much mistaken;* and friendship with Sabie means something. And she is very much interested in your work, as I know; and when I told her where you were, among such beautiful things—well, I confess I was mean enough to say it was lucky for some folk that they could go away and live among green fields and spring flowers and woods and all that, for we were walking through a horrid little lane over in Battersea—she was quite sharp with me, and said it was a very good thing some people *could* go away and bring us back reports of how beautiful the world was, and give us pictures of it that we could look at again and again with delight in the middle of all our troubles and worry. Yes, and she met the

President of the Academy at somebody's house the other evening; and he was saying very nice things about you; and she came home and repeated every one of them, and was very much pleased about it; and said how fine a thing it must be for one in your position to have such a career before him, and to have won such esteem already from your own brothers in art. But that isn't friendship—oh no! That is the carelessness of a stranger. However, I am not going to scold any more, for I don't know that there was not some make-believe in your letter. Only it does seem hard on Sabie. I suppose you don't know how kind she was to you that evening? Or how much attention do you expect, if I may speak frankly? I wondered that none of the other gentlemen were jealous of the way she devoted herself to you, both during supper and in the studio; but I suppose they find girls like Miss Sadleir and Tottie Morrison more attractive? Well, they're welcome, so long as they leave me my Sabie. She told me you had offered her that beautiful old wine-cup, and she thought it was very kind of you; but of course it would be no use to her. Besides, you could not expect her to accept so valuable a gift. Mother, who has very sharp eyes, says that something else happened just about that time. Do you know? Of course, I would not ask Sabie for worlds. But did it happen? That was not friendship, anyway? And yet you seem to think that Sabie is not kind to you.'

He took her scolding manfully; and only wished for more.

For it was very grateful to him to have it so hotly argued and proved, by one who ought to know, that Sabina held him in some little regard; and the references to that evening in the studio recalled an abundance of happiness; and he liked to be told that Sabina had shown him so much favour. He read the scolding over and over again, and did not care whether he merited it or not; it was all about Sabina, and that was sufficient. But that chance remark about the lane in Battersea gave him a twinge of conscience. He could see the two girls trudging through those squalid thoroughfares, on their errands of kindness and help, the air fœtid around them, the skies hidden away from them. While as for him, look at his surroundings at this moment! The afternoon happened to be strangely still and peaceful—it was like an evening in summer. On the higher meadows lay a soft and mellow radiance, streaming over from the west; but down here the wide stream was in shadow; and odd enough was the contrast between the turmoil of the water—with its sharp and sudden gleams of blue-black and silver-gray—and that peaceful golden landscape, and the pale cloudless overarching sky. Here and there a bird was singing; and ever there was the lulling rush of the river, a murmur filling the still evening air. And then he thought of Battersea; and of Sabina; and of her generous defence of him; and all he could say for himself was this: that if any of his transcripts of these peaceful and beautiful scenes on the Shannon had a trace of interest in her eyes, or could

make a dull corner of the house in Kensington Square one whit the brighter, she was welcome to her choice of them or to all of them put together.

There was further good news for him in the postscript.

'About the Private View of the Academy,' Miss Wygram wrote, 'Sabie says I am to thank you very much for remembering her, and she will be glad to go with us, if nothing unusual should happen.'

Now here was a notable thing; for though he was neither Academician nor Associate, he would be in a certain sense Sabina's host on this occasion, and responsible for her being pleased and entertained. And what could he do? Was there no special favour he could obtain for her? Numbers of both Academicians and Associates were amongst his most intimate friends; perhaps they could procure for him the use of some small room somewhere, so that Miss Zembra and the little party he might make up could have lunch in peace and quiet, instead of amongst the heated crowd? Failing that (and it did not sound very possible), by going early surely he could secure a table in the refreshment room, in some snug corner? And who could prove himself a better guide to her as she went round the Galleries? For each year he was in the habit of sending in a little water-colour, not to ask for public favour at all, but merely to gain for him a ticket for the Varnishing Day; and he would devote the whole of that day to a rapid survey of the Exhibition; so that when Sabina started on her round of the

rooms, he could take her without trouble and exploration to everything worth seeing. On Private View Day, as every one knows, the womenfolk rather let themselves loose in the way of conspicuous attire. And if Sabina should come amongst them in her simple gown of plain brown homespun, with its black buttons and frilled tight cuffs? He hoped she would. It was the dress he used to look out for in Kensington High Street; it was the dress that used to make his heart leap—before the era of friendship had opened. And better than any extravagance of fashion it seemed to suit the tall and lithe and graceful form.

But for the consideration of these and other high-stirring projects and fancies, he wanted more freedom and the excitement of motion; this coble amid the hurrying waters of the Shannon was all too narrow and confined; so he surrendered his rod to Johnnie Ryan, got put ashore, and presently was walking rapidly along the unfrequented highway in the direction of Lough Derg. And what, he was asking himself, ought he to strive for, in order to prove himself worthy of this rare companionship that was to be his; how was he to win further favour in her eyes? Women, he understood, rather liked the society of famous men—of men who had 'done something,' and who were known to the world. Well, now, he had never striven for fame at all. He had striven to win the appreciation of his brother-artists, and he had succeeded in a most enviable degree; but chiefly, it may be said, he worked for absolute love of

the work itself. His Wigtonshire property rendered him independent of the dealers and of any caprice of public fashion; he did his work in his own way; he could afford to linger over it, and produce his best; and the ultimate fate of it, or the effect it would have on his reputation, did not bother him much. But if women liked the society of famous men? Surely there was nothing unworthy in seeking the public approval; in doing something definite; in making his work perhaps a little more consecutive? He was walking near to the Shannon on this placid and golden evening, and it suddenly occurred to him that a series of drawings illustrative of the mighty river from its source away in the north, down to its disappearance in the sea, might show a certain coherence, and appeal to the public with more effect than any mere number of disconnected water-colours. It was a bold project, for the Shannon during its course of two hundred miles flows through almost every kind of country. He would have to face mountain scenery, and lake scenery, and gentle pastoral scenery; and he would have to deal with the varied character of the river itself, now widening out into such inland seas as Lough Ree and Lough Derg, again gliding swiftly by peaceful meadows, or wildly racing and chasing over the rocky barriers of Castle Connell. But then look at the result of these two or three years' labour: an exhibition room in Piccadilly or King Street—a Private View Day all to himself—Sabina making her appearance, along with the Wygrams, about four in the

afternoon—Sabina, as ever, gracious, and benignant, and smiling-eyed.

This newly-formed friendship seemed to demand a good deal of reverie; and it is to be observed that not only did the figure of Sabina loom large and constant in these visions of the future, but also that the society and companionship he was arranging for her were very curiously limited. In fact, there did not appear to be any room for a third or a fourth person. The Wygrams, of course, did not count; they might be regarded merely as attendants upon Sabina; while as for any one else, there was no one else. Sabina and he were to be friends; the outer world—especially the male creatures of the outer world—might surround that distinctly limited circle if they chose—at a little distance. Now, friendship is not ordinarily so exclusive. But perhaps this was an entirely novel kind.

'I'm afraid I'm very late for dinner, Nora, acushla,' said he, as he got back to the inn an hour and a half after the proper time.

'Oh, well, sir,' said Nora good-naturedly, 'we expect the gentlemen to come in at anny toime. If it's bad luck they're having with the fishing they come home, and if it's good luck they stay out. I sent you down your letters, sir.'

'Thank you kindly,' said he.

'I hope there was good news in them, sir,' said Nora, as she was giving the last touch to the turf-fire.

'Indeed, there was,' he rejoined.

'Well, it's glad I am of that, sir,' said Nora, who had been forming her little guesses; 'for sometimes a letter has a dale to say.'

'I am going back to England on Monday.'

'Are ye now, sir? Well, that's a pity, to be sure!—and Tim O'Connor declaring the weather was going to be splendid for the fishing.'

'Yes, I must be off; but some day or another I'll be coming back. No fear about that; you're too good to me over here.'

'And the next time you come, sir,' said Nora, in her demure way, as she was leaving the room, 'sure, I hope ye'll not be coming alone.'

There was no particular need that he should go back on Monday; but he knew that the art world of London was now entering upon its annual period of excitement; the studios would all be a-murmuring; and the air surcharged with stories of rejections, and rage at the hanging, and wonder at the good luck of some folks in selling their pictures. Of course, he was interested in such things; and it was natural he should return to London at such a time. As for any other reason, or subtle hope, or fascination?—no, he answered himself, there was none. He was quite heart-whole now. Those weeks of hard work and hard exercise and wholesome air on the shores of the Shannon had cured him of that hateful and febrile sadness that had made his life in London unendurable. He was going back

to assiduous and happy labour in his studio; and if by chance he were to meet Sabina in the street—down by Kensington Square, it might be, or Hyde Park Gate, or Cromwell Gardens—he would be able to take her hand without a tremor, and she should find nothing but friendship—placid and assured and abiding—in his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

BY THE SEA

But in the meantime, Mrs. Wygram had fallen ill in a vague kind of way; lassitude, loss of appetite, and melancholy were the chief symptoms; and Sabina, taking the matter in hand in her rapid and practical fashion, had no difficulty in making a diagnosis of the case. The ailment she declared to be Kensington Square; and the obvious cure —Brighton.

'Janie,' she said, 'I will run down with your mother, and see her put comfortably in a lodging, and stay with her as long as I can. Then you will look after my people from time to time; and if I'm wanted, it's merely a sixpenny telegram and I'm in London in an hour and a quarter. Even if I have to come up now and again, your mother won't feel very lonely when she knows I am coming back in the evening.'

'But why to Brighton, Sabie?' said Janie, with a sudden and jealous alarm.

'I'll tell you the reason—because it is so handy,' was the answer.

'Is Mr. Foster there?'

Sabina's face brightened.

'Yes. Poor fellow, it will be quite a pleasure to see him and try to cheer him up a bit. He is so good-natured, you know, Janie. When one looks back on that unhappy accident, it is with a good deal of remorse; and it isn't pleasant; but the moment you see him he tries to make light of it, and to put you at your ease, and then you are glad that he takes it so courageously. And just think what it must be to one who has led so active and stirring a life—to be chained down like that. Why, it's dreadful to think of! People who are walking about, and going where they like, can't even imagine what that is. Then the want of society—the dull evenings—the wet days when he is alone and indoors—do you wonder that I should be sorry for him, and feel sometimes a little miserable about it all?'

'For my part,' said Janie, somewhat coldly, 'I don't see why you should feel miserable about it in any way whatever. An accident may happen to any one. And I can't understand a bit the interest you take in him. Why, Sabie, he is the last man in the world I should have expected you to make friends with—a man who seems to have no aim in life but to amuse himself.'

'But you know, Janie, there are many people who don't even succeed in doing that,' said Sabina, in her gentle way; these two were not in the habit of quarrelling.

The end of it was that Sabina took Mrs. Wygram down

to Brighton, and got rooms for them both in a house in Regency Square.

'I shall be such a dull companion for you, Sabie,' the old lady said. 'Don't you know any young people here?'

'I don't know a soul in the place,' Sabina answered, 'except Mr. Foster, and he is another invalid. Fancy what a business I shall have in talking you both into something like light-heartedness! But how am I to see him? I want to see him; and I know where he is living—in the crescent where the Grand Hotel is. But I suppose we could hardly call on him, could we; or send him a message that we are here?'

'He is rather a stranger, isn't he?' said Mrs. Wygram doubtfully.

'A stranger? Not a bit of it! You don't keep talking to any one day after day without getting to understand him pretty well; and I seem to have known Mr. Foster all my life. I have heard all about his schooldays, and his home, and his people, and his pursuits. I assure you, there is an amount of frank egotism about him that is quite charming; and you know you should always encourage people to talk about themselves; it's the subject that interests them most.'

'You have such a wonderful patience, Sabie, with old people and with young,' said Mrs. Wygram, who had some acquaintance with the girl.

'Oh, but that is just the way I take of amusing myself,' said Sabina lightly; 'just as other people take to whist, or

billiards, or horse-racing. Now tell me what is to be done. If you knew Mr. Foster you could write and ask him to call—if the bath-chair can be got into the house. But you don't know him. Well, suppose I were to send him a note like this: "Young man, I'm old enough to be your mother, so don't be offended if I ask you to come along and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Wygram and myself?"'

'You old enough to be his mother, indeed!' Mrs. Wygram cried. 'How old is he, then?'

'Oh, I don't know,' Sabina said carelessly. 'But tell me what we should do now. Or shall we go out for a little walk first and decide so weighty a matter afterwards?'

And as it turned out, the matter was decided for them, and that forthwith and in the simplest way. When they went out they naturally strolled down towards the Pier; for the band was playing, and the wide promenade seemed a cheerful kind of place; and about the very first person they saw there was Mr. Foster himself, whose chair was being slowly pulled along. His quick, clear eyes smiled a recognition at once; Sabina, in the frankest and friendliest way, went up and shook hands with him, and introduced him to Mrs. Wygram; and there they remained, chatting, asking questions, and apparently very well pleased to have met once more.

But Mrs. Wygram was not so well pleased. She had heard a good deal about Mr. Foster from Janie; and perhaps she had unconsciously imbibed a little of the jealousy with which Janie regarded the young gentleman. Anyhow, she

was distinctly of opinion—as she remained a trifling space apart, and only half-listened to their conversation—that the manner of Mr. Foster towards Sabina was not right. It was a great deal too easy and familiar. Her beautiful Sabie (she considered) ought to be regarded with a respectful adoration—especially by young men; whereas this person in the bath-chair looked at Sabina, and spoke to her, just as if she might have been anybody. In truth, Sabina appeared to be a good deal more pleased by this chance meeting than he was; she was interested, animated, smiling, and friendly; while he glanced at her in a critical kind of way, and seemed in no wise sufficiently grateful for her condescension.

'Well, did you do as I told you?' he said. 'Did you "go Nap" on Cherry Blossom for the Grand National?'

'No, I did not,' she answered. 'But I hope you won?'

'Oh, I don't call it winning; I call it getting back a little of my stolen property. And I did pretty well on the City and Suburban too,' he added cheerfully.

'But,' she said, 'perhaps I ought not to congratulate you on winning, for, of course, that means that some one must have lost.'

'Oh, you needn't be sorry when the "bookies" get caught; they make a good enough thing of it in the end—be sure of that.'

'But some one must lose,' said this patient disciple—and

strange it was to Mrs. Wygram to hear Sabie talk about horse-racing.

'Why, yes. The great bulk of the public lose, and must lose; and why shouldn't they lose? They bet for fun, whether they know anything about the horses or not. Well, if you want your amusement, you've got to pay for it; and if your amusement is backing horses, you've got to pay for that too. You see, it isn't every one who can keep a yacht or a pack of hounds; but every one can back a horse, thanks to the noble swells who provide the animals. I consider it very disinterested on their part; it isn't many of them who have made money over it; I know a good number of gallant sportsmen who have a fine display of gold cups on their dining-room sideboard, but who don't quite like to be asked how much they cost.'

'But still, to encourage general gambling in that way——' Sabina was going to protest, but he interrupted her with a laugh.

'Oh yes, I know, Miss Zembra. It's very wicked and bad; and the grocer's apprentice who filches from his master's till in order to back a favourite will no doubt come to the gallows; and it's very distressing that people will go on risking their money on games of chance; but then, such is life.'

'We might try to make life a little better than we find it,' she said tentatively; somehow he had not the air of one who would listen to words of wisdom.

He looked at her and said gravely: 'I'm going to tell you something. Don't you forget it. If you can get anybody to give you ten to one against Macedon for the Two Thousand, just you take it—and you'll remember me with tears of gratitude.'

'You are incorrigible,' she said; but she said it with a smile; for there was far more of good humour than of argument in her composition; and she was pleased to find him so confident and self-reliant and in such good spirits.

They went out to the farther end of the Pier, which he said was his favourite retreat; for there, while he could command an uninterrupted view of the coastline all the way from Worthing Point out to the successive chalk headlands of Seaford and the Seven Sisters, the music near at hand was softened to the ear by the intervention of the glass screen. He could either listen to the band; or read the morning newspaper, and its guesses about the forthcoming race-meetings; or overlook the small boats rowing below; or watch here and there a big steamer leaving an almost stationary trail of smoke along the far horizon. And this particular morning, as it happened, was exceedingly bright and cheerful; a light west wind blowing; the clear green water glancing in a myriad diamonds of sunlight along each shimmering ripple; now and again soft purple patches telling of the shadow of a cloud; overhead a quite summer-like sky. Then there was much liveliness abroad; the last delayed of the fishing-smacks coming in from the south

east; the heavy-booted crews making their way home to bed; the salesmen and packers getting off the boxes and barrels of mackerel and conger to the London market; holiday-folks down on the shingle; children paddling where the sand showed at low tide; the boatmen and photographers and newsboys busy; a traffic brisker than usual for that time of the year visible in the King's Road.

'Oh yes,' he continued, as Sabina stood by the side of the Bath-chair, or leant over the rails to watch the manœuvring of a small sailing-boat below; 'this is an excellent place; there is always something going on, something to look at. I know all the girls—I mean by headmark. It's quite nice to see the young things trying to make-believe that it is summer already with their pretty bonnets and dresses. And you, Miss Zembra,' he added, with no embarrassment at all, 'aren't you going to take advantage of the seaside? You know people allow themselves a little liberty when they come here—in the way of costume, I mean. Pray don't think me rude, but I should fancy now that a sailor's hat—a straw hat, you know, with a band of red silk, or something of that kind—would become you very well, and be a little brighter for the seaside. Don't you?'

The suggestion was no doubt made in simple friendliness; but Mrs. Wygram did not like it.

'If you would care to see the prettiest dress Miss Zembra ever wore—to my thinking—I can show it to you.'

She took from her pocket an envelope, and from the

envelope a photograph. It was a photograph of Sabina in her hospital costume—a plain striped gown; a white cap and apron—the apron furnished with shoulder-straps; her nurse's implements slung by a silver chain from her girdle; a silver brooch—an anchor—at her neck. He glanced at the photograph, and handed it back with a laugh.

'I did not think they would have allowed you to wear any ornament,' he said, still addressing Sabina; 'but I see you wore the same brooch you are wearing now.'

'And you would not easily get Miss Zembra to part with that brooch,' said the little old lady proudly. 'It was given her by some of the boys on board the *Chichester;* they subscribed among themselves—and that was what they sent her. At least,' continued Mrs. Wygram (for she was determined that Mr. Foster should know there were other people who could appreciate Sabina, if he seemed so careless and indifferent),—'at least that was the story, and perhaps it is partly true. But I have my suspicions. I know that the only time I ever went down to see the *Chichester* there was a young officer there who went round the ship with us, and I noticed that he was particularly attentive to a young lady—I wouldn't mention names for the world. And when he spoke of this subscription, I guessed who would help in that. Boys in training-ships don't have many pence, I should think. Oh yes, and the letter he sent!—I shouldn't have expected lads like that to use such beautiful English——'

'Now, Mrs. Wygram, don't you say anything against my boys,' Sabina said, but she had turned away partly —perhaps to get a better view of that little sailing-boat.

They chatted and looked around them until lunch-time; and then they made for home—the two ladies accompanying the Bath-chair as far as the turnstile of the pier.

'Good-bye,' he said, and raised his hat slightly.

But Sabina hesitated for a moment. 'Shall you be out again in the afternoon?' she asked.

'Well, no,' he answered. 'I was thinking of looking in at the tennis court.'

'What, on a day like this?' she exclaimed. 'Surely that is unwise on the part of an invalid.'

'Oh, but I don't look on myself as an invalid at all,' he said. 'I am an expectant—a tide-waiter—a tied-waiter, you see! An excellent joke! Well, good morning!'

'If you will come along at five o'clock, we will give you a cup of tea,' she said.

'Thanks, awfully—but a Bath-chair is such a nuisance in a room——'

'Oh, don't say that!' she interposed, with a touch of appeal in her tone.

'Well, I will come, if I may; what is your number in the Square?'—and then, when he had got that information, they went their several ways.

During lunch Sabina talked of nothing but Mr. Foster,

and of his wonderful courage and equanimity under this heavy trial.

'You don't know how grateful I am to him,' she said, 'when I see him so light-hearted. If he were to fret and pine over it, as many another man would, just think how miserable I should feel.'

'So you've said a hundred times, Sabie,' Mrs. Wygram answered patiently, 'and so you've said to Janie; but if you were to talk from now to Doomsday, you wouldn't convince me that you ought to hold yourself responsible for that accident.'

'Why was I such a fool as to call out, then?' was the immediate rejoinder. 'I don't believe he would have harmed the dog at all. And I am quite certain he wouldn't have gone near the heap of gravel.'

Mrs. Wygram did not choose to argue; but somehow she was not well disposed to Mr. Foster.

'You may be as grateful as you please,' she said to Sabina; 'I should have liked to hear of his being a little grateful, on his side, for all the kindness and attention he received.'

'Ah, don't be so hard on the poor fellow, dear Mrs. Wygram,' said Sabina. 'How would you like it if you were shut up in a Bath-chair like that?'

'How should I like it?' Mrs. Wygram retorted, with a trifle of indignation in her voice. 'Well, I know this; if I were in a Bath-chair, and if I were a man, and a young

lady came of her own accord to pay me a good deal of attention, and to be very friendly and courteous and obliging, I think I should do or say something to show that I recognised how kind she was trying to be. I should not show myself an indifferent boor. Why, a man——'

'Now, now, dear Mrs. Wygram, please to stop,' said Sabina; but she was not very angry. 'You don't know what you're saying. And besides, that is why I like Mr. Foster; he is honest, and does not pretend to be more interested in you than he really feels.'

After lunch Mrs. Wygram was ordered by her imperious nurse to go away and lie down for a while; and then, about half-past three, Sabina came for her.

'The people are coming out,' she said. 'Shall we go for a little stroll? I want to see the fashions.' And then she said: 'Really, the clear light here is dreadful for showing you how shabby your clothes are. Did you ever see anything so disgraceful as this bonnet of mine?'

She was holding it up to the window. Then she said: 'Yes, we will go along to the shops; and you know we ought to join in with the others and make-believe that summer is come already; and I am going to get you a new bonnet—no, no, now, you needn't protest, for I always have my own way in the end—yes, I am going to get you a bonnet of a lighter colour, with a little frivolity in it, for of course when we are at the seaside we must follow the seaside fashions.'

And then again she said, 'I wonder, now, if I am too old and grave a person to wear a sailor's hat?'

'You too old, Sabie? Oh yes, indeed! You look so old!' was Mrs. Wygram's answer.

But when they had got outside and were going along the King's Road, a sudden thought occurred to Sabina's companion.

'Sabie,' she said, 'what put the notion of getting a sailor's hat into your head? Was it Mr. Foster's suggestion?'

'And supposing it was?' the tall, bland-featured girl answered, in her good-natured way.

'But do you know what you are doing?' Mrs. Wygram said half-angrily. 'It is not the custom for young gentlemen to advise young ladies as to what they should wear.'

'Oh, nonsense!—a chance hint of that kind?—I should have taken it from anybody. And besides,' Sabina added, 'what do you mean by young ladies and young gentlemen? I tell you I am old enough to be his mother.'

'Oh yes, very old!' Mrs. Wygram replied, with a fine irony; 'and very plain, too. Remarkably plain. I suppose you didn't notice how the people were looking at you out at the end of the Pier? I did, if you didn't; and to me it didn't seem the best of manners. And you'll put a band of red silk round the hat, as he directed you?'

'No, I don't think I will do that,' Sabina answered. 'I will get a band of cream-coloured satin, I think; or of the colour of this dress, if I can.'

'And you will be wearing that hat when he comes along this afternoon?'

'Well, no; for I don't wear a hat indoors.'

'But it will be lying about?'

'It may. But, dear Mrs. Wygram, what do you mean? A trifle of this kind! And Janie isn't here; you know it is Janie who generally chooses my things for me.'

That evening Mrs. Wygram had to write to her daughter, and this was the postscript of the letter:

'I don't know what to say or think about Sabie. Of course she is goodness itself to me—that she is always—and never was she more kind and considerate and affectionate. And you know how I love the girl. But she puzzles me. For either she carries good nature to the verge of folly—and over it—or else she is the most abominable flirt that ever breathed.'

This set Janie a-crying; and she answered in hot haste:

'Mother, I beg you will not say such things about Sabie. It's very little you know about her if you can think them for a moment. But I see how it is, and understand it perfectly; you *do* love her, and you are *jealous;* and I knew that would be so the moment you saw how interested she is in Mr. Foster. I hope it won't be a misery to all of us. What should we do, mother, if anything happened to our Sabie?'

CHAPTER X

AT THE ACADEMY

The tender heart of Janie was to be still further distracted. Sabina refused to go up to town for the Private View of the Academy.

'I can't leave my charge,' she wrote, 'just when it is most necessary that she should be driven about, and walked about, and generally looked after.'

Janie, in great distress, forthwith appealed to her mother.

'She *must* come, mother. It is a promise. I pledged my word to Walter Lindsay that she should go with us. Surely it cannot be that she is so fascinated by that contemptible horse-jockey that she is going to disappoint us all in this way? Of course, don't repeat what I have just said, or she will think it necessary to defend him, and I don't want to quarrel with her about anybody like *that*. But appeal to the real Sabie—to our Sabie. Does she know how Mr. Lindsay has set his heart on taking her to the Academy? And Mrs. Tremenheere has promised to go with us in your place; and then if Sabie comes up on

the Thursday night she can go down to you again on the following afternoon or evening. The truth is, I have not dared to speak of it to Mr. Lindsay; I could not do it; I tell you he has just set his heart on it; and it's for you, now, dearest mother, to try to bring that abominable wretch to her senses.'

There was not the slightest difficulty about it. When it was pointed out to Sabina that her refusal to go would give a great deal of pain to two of her friends, she merely elevated her eyebrows a little in surprise, as if that had never occurred to her before; and when Mrs. Wygram added that she herself would take it as a favour if Sabie yielded to the wishes of those kind people, Sabina instantly and good-naturedly said yes. Only she stipulated that she should go up on the Friday morning and return the same evening.

Walter Lindsay never knew how near he had been to a bitter disappointment; he was merely told (Janie assuming a little air of authority on the occasion) at what hour he might expect Sabina to arrive at Burlington House. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that he had not been able to obtain the use of any private room for their luncheon; though one distinguished Academician had facetiously offered to place the Diploma Gallery at the disposal of the party. And be sure he was waiting at the top of the staircase long before the time at which Mrs. Tremenheere and Sabina and Janie had promised to appear. The people

came pouring in: elderly gentlemen already opening their catalogues and adjusting their glasses; gorgeous matrons scanning the crowd in search of friends; young ladies with a quick eye for other young ladies' gowns; young gentlemen with a quick eye for those young ladies' faces. And to many of these the tall and pale young artist, who stood as close as might be to the wicket, was known; and he had perfunctorily to shake hands with them and say a word or two; but ever his anxious gaze went down that wide, thick-carpeted stair, eagerly scrutinising each successive group as it arrived. And as it chanced he was caught napping after all. A sculptor friend came to him and touched him on the shoulder.

'Lindsay,' he said, 'I want you to come and look at my bust of Mrs.—— Have you seen it yet?'

'No, I haven't; but I will remember; all right.'

'Come along, now, won't you?—a minute will do—the fact is, they've all been abusing it and pitching into it—and I want you to say it isn't so bad as all that.'

'But I'm waiting for some people, man,' Lindsay broke in, not too cordially.

'My good fellow, it won't take you a minute!'

And so he cast a last despairing glance down the crowded staircase, and impatiently followed his friend into the sculpture room. He was not there more than three minutes. And then it was, as he was hastening back to his post, that he suddenly found before him—Sabina!

Other people saw advancing towards him a young lady, tall and fair and smiling; he only saw a face, a kind of bewilderment of light shining there and in her eyes; and if his heart seemed to choke him somewhat (in a manner not quite consistent with the new friendship he had established) he had scarcely time to attend to that. Perhaps he shook hands with her—he did not know; probably he also greeted Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie; at all events he seemed to want to take them through all the rooms at once; and yet not to know where to begin; while the fingers that held the open catalogue were far from being so steady as the new friendship demanded. As for Sabina, she was certainly not perturbed. Nor did she seem particularly anxious to see the pictures. She looked at the crowd in her gentle, bland, pleased way; recognising here and there a familiar face, and perhaps not paying as much attention to her eager guide as she ought to have done. However, she eventually yielded to his solicitation and they began their laborious round. He made it as easy as possible for her—if Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie had pretty well to look out for themselves. He took her to all the principal pictures. If any one stopped her and spoke to her, he made no scruple about dragging her away, and insisting upon her looking at this or that. And Sabina was very kind to him, for she knew he was giving himself a great deal of trouble on her behalf; and the new relationship he had established between himself and her seemed

to him a distinctly joyous thing—sending, as it were, flashes of gladness through his veins every time she turned towards him, or spoke to him, or happened to let the sleeve of her bronze plush cloak come near his arm. It was a very pretty costume, by the way, that she wore, though it was not the simple brown homespun of his expectation; and he could see that it was admired—and that Sabina was admired—by the little covert glances that both men and women directed towards her as they passed. And of course he perjured his soul a hundred times in quickly assenting to everything she said. Why should he dispute her judgment? What was his miserable cut-and-dried knowledge of technique as compared with the generous appreciation of a fresh young soul? Could he check kindness? Would he like her eyes to be less benignant? Where her abundant good nature saw merit, what right had he to point out defects? In short, what mattered the pictures to him in any way whatever? He would have made a holocaust of the whole collection had it belonged to him, if only Sabina would have been interested in the riotous blaze. And all this, it must be remembered, was but part of the new friendship.

'And where is your own picture, Mr. Lindsay?' Sabina said to him.

'Oh, that is nothing,' he answered.

'But I wish to see it,' she said.

'Really, it is not worth looking at,' he protested. 'It

is a little thing I sent in merely to get a ticket for Varnishing Day.'

'But I wish to see it,' she said, with mild persistence.

'The water-colour room is at the other end,' he pointed out; for he did not wish Sabina to take this luckless little contribution as in any way representative of his work.

'Then you won't take me to see it?'

Of course this was a command; and forthwith they set about making their way through the now crowded rooms. And scant indeed was the recognition his friends obtained from him on that busy morning; for it seemed as if there were a hundred thousand things he had to say to Sabina; and that the time was all too short. And then, was it not his duty to keep her amused and interested and pleased? He was her host, in a measure; he was responsible for her being entertained; he would have ample opportunities of talking with all those various friends and acquaintances after Sabina had gone away once more from London.

'Why, you seem to know every one,' she said to him, as they were making their slow progress through the galleries.

And yet he had no wish to show her off—to proclaim their friendship, that is to say, before all these people. Far rather would he have had her go away into some quiet corner—into the room for architectural drawings, for example—and sit down there, so that he might recollect some of the hundred thousand things he had to tell her. He was not in any way anxious that these good folk should

admire Sabina, or look at her pretty dress, or be struck by the proud and gracious set of her neck and shoulders, and the sweetness of her smile. He was far more anxious that she should not become tired, or indifferent, or bored; and the hundred thousand things he had to tell her seemed to narrow themselves down in a dreadful way, or refused to be summoned altogether; so that he could only say to himself, 'Well, I am a blatant idiot; but Sabina is so good-natured that she pretends to be pleased.' The new friendship was progressing.

Eventually they found the little picture; it was a harmless kind of thing—merely a study of a black windmill and an up-lying field, golden with charlock, against an almost silver-white sky; and when Sabina out of kindness would praise it, he rather resented her approval, for he did not wish her to imagine that was how he always painted.

'But you need not think that,' she said. 'I have seen so much of your work. And I am sure I did not half thank you for the beautiful drawing you sent me from the Shannon. I was so busy at the time. But I prize it none the less, I assure you; do you know that I took it down to Brighton and we have it hung up there—of course to be brought away again when we leave?'

'Oh, did you?' he said; there was a kind of music in the air.

And then he suddenly discovered that it was a quarter to one, and therefore time for lunch.

'Do come, now,' he said, 'and we will get a quiet place to ourselves. I don't want to have you tired out. Besides, you must be hungry; you left Brighton by the 9.45.'

'How do you know that?' she said, glancing at him.

'You must have left then; I looked at the time-table.'

And they did, as it happened, get a quiet corner for themselves in the luncheon-room; and whether it was owing to some mysterious subsidy or not, they appeared to be very well attended to, while people at the other tables were looking vacuously about them or making impatient and fruitless appeals to overharassed waiters. Curiously enough, too, Sabina sat at his right hand, where Mrs. Tremenheere should have been; but perhaps that was an accident. And Janie was very pleased and happy; and said in an undertone to Mrs. Tremenheere—for Mr. Lindsay had a good many things to say to Miss Zembra, so that these two were occupied—that never in all her life had she seen Sabie looking so beautiful. Janie was a kind-hearted creature, and talked to Mrs. Tremenheere without ceasing.

And what did Lindsay say, now that she and he were together in this secluded nook, their shoulders almost touching, their heads not far apart, he humbly solicitous about the smallest details of the frugal little banquet he had provided for her? Well, it was all a lamentation over the fact that no ladies could be present even as lookers-on

at the Academy dinner that was to take place the following evening.

'You see,' he continued—and he addressed himself exclusively to Sabina—'the walls are covered to the roof with pictures—as many a poor wretch knows to his cost; and I suppose it would be impossible to have a gallery for spectators. But it is a pity; for there is no such sight to be seen anywhere else, or at any other time, in Great Britain. All England's greatest are there—her statesmen, and poets, and soldiers, and lawyers, and painters; a stranger would think he had got among a lot of portraits out of the illustrated papers; it is an extraordinary assemblage of the brains and wealth of the country. Yes,' he said, glancing at her; 'I have no doubt you are asking yourself how I ever came to be in that galley.'

'Indeed I was not,' she said warmly.

'I asked myself the question,' he continued modestly, 'when I looked round last year and found myself the only insignificant duffer at our particular table, for I'm not even a picture-buyer. But I have a good many friends in the Academy—I suppose that is it.'

'I should rather think it was meant as a recognition of your work,' Sabina said gently; 'and I should be very proud of it if I were you.'

'However, as I was saying,' he interposed rather quickly, 'it is an extraordinary sight; and then, you know, they keep the lights somewhat lowered during dinner—though

you wouldn't think it, for the place is so brilliant—until the President has proposed the toast of the Queen's health, and then, when he winds up with "Your Royal Highnesses, my lords, and gentlemen—the Queen!" all of a sudden the lights are put at full blaze, and the effect is quite startling. You should see them all standing up—the Queen's Ministers, the ex-Ministers, Judges, Generals, Bishops, Academicians, and all—while the singers at the far end of the hall sing "God save the Queen!" And to think that such an assemblage is brought together every year in England, and that there should be no ladies to look on!'

And why was he so miserable because there would be no gentle-eyed spectators of the following night's banquet? At the banquet of the previous year—the first to which he had been invited—the subject had not even occurred to him.

'No,' he continued, 'nor do they ask any womenfolk to the annual dinner of the Academy Club—at the Trafalgar at Greenwich. But that is less to be wondered at, for it is a kind of half-private affair; and there is a good deal of jollification going on—smoking, and singing, and speech-making. Oh, and very pretty it is at the beginning of the evening, if you happen to have a seat facing the big bay window, and can watch the red-sailed barges floating down on the yellow water. It's rather an early dinner, you know, though they keep it up late enough; for when they get back to town, a lot of them—those that aren't afraid of

their wives—generally go down to Mackinnon's rooms in Buckingham Street, to have a midnight palaver and a final pipe or two.'

'There seems to be a fair amount of merry-making in the art world,' Sabina observed.

'At present there is,' he said rather apologetically, 'because everybody is glad to have got finished with his year's work. And from now on to the Academy Conversazione at the end of June, there won't be much painting done—amongst the landscapers, anyway—there will be a good deal of dining, and dancing, and lawn-tennis, and so on—but after the Conversazione the general dispersal will take place—away to Brittany, and Spain, and the Riviera, or over to Holland, or up to Norway, or to the wilds of Connemara and Galway—each man wanting to have a place all to himself, of course, and growling if any one comes near him.'

'And where are you going?' she asked.

'I?'

The question seemed to startle him. Perhaps he had made no definite plans. Or had some wild notion flashed into his brain that he would fain have that depend on Sabina's whereabouts?

'I hardly know,' he stammered. 'I suppose you too will be going away from London, Miss Zembra?'

He hardly looked up at her.

'I think not,' she said simply, 'unless Mrs. Wygram

improves much more rapidly than she is doing at present. I will keep her at Brighton for some time; and I may as well make that my holiday.'

'Do you mean that you will be in London all the autumn when everybody else will be away?' he asked, and he had grown suddenly thoughtful.

'Your everybody else will be away, no doubt,' she answered smiling; 'but my everybody else can't get away, unhappily. Yes; if I take a holiday now, I daresay I shall be in London through the autumn. But isn't it time we were returning to the pictures?'

And he was not unwilling to take up his task again, for he had been forming certain dark designs. Sabina was going down to Brighton by the 4.30 express; Mrs. Tremenheere and Janie wanted to wait to see the people arrive in the afternoon; and it was Janie who considerately suggested that, if Sabina must really leave, perhaps Mr. Lindsay would be so kind as to see her as far as Victoria Station. Sabina protested that nothing of the sort was necessary; but Mr. Lindsay took little heed of the protest; on the contrary, he rather hurried her through the remaining rooms in order that they should get away early. He was not sure that they would get a cab easily. The streets might be blocked. Wasn't St. James's Park torn up as usual? The end of it all was that he and she together left the Academy when it was barely four o'clock.

And to be in a hansom with Sabina!—to be so close to

her—to see her gloved hand resting on the little iron ledge —to have charge of her small travelling-bag—to be able to direct her attention to this and that—to steal an occasional covert glance at the pale oval of her cheeks and her soft clear eyes! Of course he told the cabman to drive round by Hyde Park Corner and Grosvenor Place; and the trees in the Green Park were showing their foliage now; and there was a breezy light in the May skies; and the crowd in Piccadilly and the continual string of carriages made up a picture sufficiently animated and cheerful. The new friendship had begun so delightfully! Sabina was with him, and with him alone; he had charge of her; there was none to interfere. And she was to be all by herself in London through the autumn—when still she might want, and welcome, a friend.

And then, again, at Victoria Station a little judicious bribery procured him access to the platform; and when he had procured for her a seat in the Pullman car, and purchased for her a vast assortment of magazines and illustrated papers, they had nearly a quarter of an hour in which to walk up and down. Alas! that the time was so short—for he still seemed to have a hundred thousand things to say—and he wanted her to have some tea—and he was so sorry that the sleeve of her plush cloak had been somewhat marked by her driving in the hansom—and he even went the length of lightly smoothing out one or two of these creases. Because, you see, Janie was not there, and Sabina

was accustomed to have some one wait on her and be kind to her.

The hateful hands of the great clock kept creeping on, and at length the guard came along with his warning. Sabina went in and took her seat. He kept by the window outside until the train began to move slowly away; and then Sabina smiled her farewell thanks to him; and presently he found himself standing on that wide, empty platform, alone.

He did not go away quickly from Victoria Station; no, he kept lingering about there, looking at the long platform where he and she had walked together. And when at length he set out for home he went rather slowly and thoughtfully; and, strangely enough, he chose his way by Cornwall Gardens and Victoria Road and through Kensington Square. And then, again, he did not pursue a straight course; he turned back a little in Kensington High Street; and went into a florist's shop there; and rather idly looked about; and seemed more interested in the place than in the purchase he eventually made. The flowers he directed to be sent to Miss Janie Wygram; but he did not send his card with them; he only meant that they should go to the dusky drawing-room where sometimes he had found Sabina in the bygone days.

But at last he got home and into his studio. Somehow it seemed a very lonely and silent place; and he could not even think of work; almost mechanically he threw off

his coat and hat, and sat down to the piano, and began to let his fingers wander over the keys. And what were his fancies about? Well, they were not very sad after all; for he was thinking of August—and the great city very empty, but for the presence of Sabina—and his being in London during that strange time—and sometimes seeing her. And what was the air that he was quite inadvertently—and somewhat slowly and absently—playing? He did not himself notice how entirely inappropriate it was to the new friendship:

Parlatele d'amor, o cari fior,
Ditele che l'adoro,
Ch' è il solo mio tesoro,
Ditele che il mio cor langue d'amor!

CHAPTER XI

A FOREBODING

Sabina returned to Brighton, and to Mrs. Wygram, and to long, idling, sunny mornings at the end of the West Pier in the society of Mr. Fred Foster. Mrs. Wygram looked on at this continual and ever-increasing intimacy with an alarm which it was impossible for her to put into words. In her small way, too, she did what she could to avert the danger that she too clearly foresaw. But it was in vain that she hinted her preference for inland drives; and she could not well insist, for it was Sabina who defrayed the cost of these amusements. And it was in vain that she tried to cultivate Sabina's interest in Mr. Lindsay; pointing out his name in the list of the guests at the Academy banquet; telling her how he had been included in the toast of the 'Outsiders' at the Academy Club dinner at Greenwich, and that his speech in reply had produced the most favourable impression; coming back again and again to inconsequent praise of the Shannon drawing they had hung up in their small sitting-room; and wondering if there was a possibility of his being descended from the high-sounding

Sir David Lindsay of the Mount,
Lord Lion King at Arms.

Sabina, however, seemed indifferent about Mr. Lindsay. She expressed no dissent when Mrs. Wygram insisted that he was so clever, and handsome, and popular, and modest, and all the rest of it; nay, she would even admit that that was true, and that he was deserving of all good things; but there an end. And Mrs. Wygram was afraid to express any more clearly her wishes—and her fears.

Moreover, as time went on, she observed a remarkable alteration in Mr. Foster's manner towards Sabina, and it came about in this way. On the morning after Sabina's return from London they as usual strolled out to the end of the Pier, and there, sure enough, was the occupant of the Bath-chair reading a pink-coloured sporting paper, and apparently very well content with himself.

'Ah, how do you do, Miss Zembra!' said he. 'I was thinking about you yesterday when you were in London.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes. I chanced to fall in with one of the local magnates—an ex-Mayor—who said I had met him somewhere or other, I forget where, and we had a pretty long chat together. Well, amongst other things he was telling me about a fête and bazaar they mean to hold in the Pavilion Gardens to raise funds for—what was it?—I think some Convalescent Home attached to the Children's Hospital; and that his wife had undertaken to get up a stall for the

sale of flowers and bonbons, and so on. But the ex-Mayoress, it appears, is a sensible woman. She says she wants to obtain the services of an exceedingly pretty young lady, who would be able to get plenty of money for the flowers from the young fellows about. Well, I told him I knew some one who answered that description, and who might possibly be induced to help.'

Now this was Mr. Foster's ordinary manner towards Sabina; and bitterly and angrily did Mrs. Wygram resent it. Why should he talk to her so coolly and indifferently? How dared he say to her face that she was a pretty young lady? What kind of a description was that of Sabina? Why, he almost assumed an air of patronage—said Mrs. Wygram to herself in her jealous wrath—this whipper-snapper, who was not worthy of having a single look of her beautiful Sabie bestowed on him!

There was little difficulty in persuading Sabina to give her services in aid of the Children's Hospital; only she said to him: 'You know, Mr. Foster, that charity has been defined as A asking B to help C. Now I want to know what A is going to do this time.'

'Who is A?'

'You.'

'How am I A?'

'Because you asked me to do certain things for certain other people. But what are you going to do yourself?'

'Well,' said he solemnly, 'if my little speculation on the

Two Thousand comes off all right you won't find me behindhand. No, no; you'll have one good customer at all events. But what am I to do with the flowers when I've got them? I don't know anybody in this town hardly.'

'What are you to do with them? Give them back to me and I will sell them over again,' said Sabina promptly.

It did not seem to occur to him that he might present the flowers to Sabina herself; perhaps he thought she was too matter-of-fact a young woman to care for such things.

However, the date fixed for the bazaar was some way off yet; and in the meantime they had got into a long spell of fine weather; and these two saw a good deal of each other, in the open air and the sunlight. Their meeting of a morning at the end of the Pier was almost an understood arrangement; and then in the golden afternoons they would pass into the greensward enclosure of Regency Square, or go round to the Pavilion Gardens, now becoming beautiful with flowers and the clear-tinted young summer foliage. And not only had Sabina got her sailor's hat, but she appeared to be much more particular about her costume than had been her wont in London; she made herself very neat and trim; and wore pretty things round her neck and at her wrists; and was most fastidious about the dressing of her hair. Mrs. Wygram ventured to make some little comment; and the girl only looked surprised; and said she supposed that it was idleness that made her attentive to such trifles.

And very bright and cheerful and animated looked those Pavilion Gardens on the day set apart for the fête; the umbrageous elms shimmering in their freshest green; young maidens and children in summer costume strolling along the paths, or crossing the wide smooth lawn; two regimental bands playing alternately; long strings of coloured lamps already hung up for the evening illumination; the white tents round the enclosure busy with visitors. Sabina's stall was almost entirely given up to flowers; and not only had she an abundant store of sprays and button-holes and bouquets, but also she had large masses of wall-flower, daffodils, marsh-marigolds, and the like, on the chance of the aldermen's wives and daughters understanding the art of decorating their dining-rooms. The worthy ex-Mayor and his wife, on whose behalf Sabina had undertaken the function of saleswoman, were most assiduous in bringing her customers; and she was not overexacting with her prices; sometimes people came back. Mrs. Wygram lent a helping hand. Mr. Foster was there, but made no undue profession of his acquaintance; whenever the tall, fair flower-girl was busy, he had his Bath-chair removed away under the elm-trees, and remained there, listening to the band.

And now occurred the incident which seemed to Mrs. Wygram (but perhaps she was unjustly jealous, owing to Janie's repeated warnings) to be the turning-point in Mr. Foster's attitude towards Sabina. There came into the

enclosure two young fellows who appeared to be known to him; they went up and spoke to him and remained chatting. These were the first of Mr. Foster's friends that Sabina had seen; and she was rather pleased to find that they were not of a horsey type. No; they were merely a couple of tall, light-haired, healthy-complexioned, well-dressed English lads, whom one might associate with plenty of boating and cricket, but hardly with the turf. And presently she had a better opportunity of seeing what they were like, for Mr. Foster brought them along to the stall.

'Miss Zembra,' said he, 'I have brought you a couple of customers; but don't be too hard on them.'

Good-looking lads they were, she thought; though the younger one was evidently very shy. He scarcely lifted his eyes to the beautiful, gracious flower-girl; he selected the first little spray that came handy, and paid for it, and seemed rather glad to retire. The elder and taller of the two was not so timid; he appeared to be a little fastidious in his choice; and once or twice when he asked her a question, he ventured to glance at her.

'How much did you say this rose was?' he asked.

'Two shillings.'

'Oh yes, I will take that, if you please.'

He put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket and took out a couple of coins.

'I am afraid,' said he rather bashfully, 'that you will find them rather discoloured; but I hope you won't mind.'

And with that he put down two sovereigns on the board, and said 'Good morning!' and raised his hat, and went away.

'I beg your pardon—stay a moment!' Sabina instantly called to him.

He turned and came back, looking somewhat confused. Sabina was not. She smiled towards him, and said, 'You know I cannot give you any of the money back—they never allow that at bazaars—but I will give you another rose if you like.'

She picked out a white rose and handed it to him; her eyes were very gracious.

'I'm sure it's awfully kind of you,' said he, blushing furiously; and then he managed to stammer, 'and—and, of course, it's this one I shall keep—I—I don't want the other one now.'

'Here is a pin if you wish to wear it,' said Sabina. 'Mrs. Wygram, will you fasten it?'

(For Mrs. Wygram was outside the stall.)

'Thank you, very, very much,' said he; but it was to Sabina he said it, not to Mrs. Wygram.

'Look here, Lionel,' said Mr. Foster, somewhat sharply, 'we'd better clear out; we're only blocking the way.'

And so the three friends went off, and were seen of Sabina no more that day. But by and by, when she got a favourable chance, Mrs. Wygram went round and inside the stall. She seemed vexed, and yet partly inclined to laugh as well.

'Sabie,' said she, 'I don't know whether you know it or not, but I do believe you are the most atrocious flirt I ever saw in my life.'

'What do you mean?' the girl said, not a little startled.

'Why, the way you went on with that poor young fellow —giving him a rose—and looking all kinds of things—you've sent him away with his head quite bewildered.'

'Oh, don't say that!' Sabina said, but still rather wondering. 'Why, don't you understand he gave me two sovereigns for a rose? Do you imagine boys of his age have so many sovereigns to spare—or would spend them that way if they had?'

'He would have given you his boots and his gloves and his watch-chain after the way you looked at him!' Mrs. Wygram protested.

'Oh, don't say that! I thought it was very kind of him to give me so much towards my stall; and of course I wanted to be civil to him. I hope I was,' she added boldly.

'Oh yes, you were,' Mrs. Wygram retorted. 'You were very civil indeed—if that is what you call civility. I think that is what Janie calls it too. No, she calls it kindness—she said it was only kindness when you sipped some wine out of Mr. Lindsay's chalice, so that he might put it back among his treasures.'

For an instant or two she could not remember; then a slight colour came to her face. 'I did not think there was any harm,' she said.

'I suppose you don't know that you have sent Mr. Foster away very angry?'

'Mr. Foster!' said Sabina, with her eyes wide—as if she wanted to know what Mr. Foster had to do with her.

'But it's true; and if I am not mistaken, you won't find him back here again to-day!'

Mrs. Wygram was not mistaken. Mr. Foster put in no further appearance. And it was not until the evening, when they were in the quietude of their own rooms, that Mrs. Wygram said, 'Well, now, Sabie, I will tell you the truth. I really don't think you know how pretty your eyes are; and you do mischief without intending it. You need not look at men in so frank a way; you should be a little more self-conscious and watchful. Why, you fairly blinded that young fellow this morning!'

'A schoolboy!' said Sabina, but with her cheeks reddening a little. 'I wonder you could think of such a thing!'

'Sabie, why will you go on persuading yourself that you are an old woman?' the other exclaimed. 'It's all those hospitals! You've been so accustomed to take charge of people—to be good to them, and humour them, and be a kind of mother to them—that you forget you are a young woman, with remarkably beautiful eyes. And some day or another you will break a man's heart—that will be the end.'

'Oh, you need not talk such nonsense,' said Sabina, proudly.

Now if Mr. Foster went away from the Pavilion Gardens in anger, he showed no trace of anything of the kind when they met as usual on the Pier next morning. And it was from that morning that Mrs. Wygram (in her subsequent conversations with Janie) professed to date the change in his manner towards Sabina. He no longer treated her with friendly indifference, varied now and again with a little jocose raillery; he seemed more anxious to please her and to win her favour. Those two Lionel lads happened to come down the pier that morning; and of course they stopped to speak to him; and they raised their hats to Sabina, who was standing by, and who graciously acknowledged that salutation. In the ordinary course of affairs Mr. Foster might fairly have introduced them by name to Miss Zembra, after their kindness of the day before; but he did nothing of the sort; and they had perforce to go on, rather lingeringly, as Mrs. Wygram imagined. That afternoon Mr. Foster sent Sabina some flowers. The next morning he told her he had taken a box at the theatre for that same evening; and that it would be very, very kind of her if she and Mrs. Wygram would come and keep him company.

'But a Bath-chair—in a theatre?' she said.

'Oh, George and I will manage,' he said confidently. 'If you come along in the evening, you will find me already in the box—box G it is; I should be very grateful to you if you would.'

And it seemed to her that it would be unfriendly to

refuse; here he was in a strange town, with hardly any society; and he was bearing his banishment so bravely. And so she and Mrs. Wygram went, and found him comfortably ensconced in a large box commanding an easy view of the stage; and there was a little bouquet lying in readiness for each of the ladies. The piece was a merry one, played by an excellent London company; and Sabina had not been in a theatre for many a day, and she had the natural and healthy laughter of a schoolgirl. He had tea and coffee brought to them between the acts; in short, he paid them every attention that was possible; and when they finally got home, even Mrs. Wygram had to confess, not only that they had spent a most charming evening, but that Mr. Foster, when he chose, could make himself very pleasant and agreeable.

Whether Mrs. Wygram entirely relished the change from Mr. Foster's half-supercilious indifference to his mood of eager and respectful amiability may perhaps be questioned; but at all events it afforded her plenty of material for study and conjecture. One of its chief features was an almost continual wish on his part to be justifying himself and his ways of life in Sabina's eyes. Hitherto he seemed to care nothing for her opinion; he had even jocularly told her of one or two foolish love-affairs. But now he seemed anxious to stand well with her; and would make excuses for himself and his pursuits; and would even recall things she had said on former occasions that he might urge some plea of defence.

'No, I am not a great reader,' he said one morning, *à propos* of nothing at all; 'it's men and women who interest me most——'

'Next to horses?' Sabina suggested, with a smile.

'Now, that isn't fair, Miss Zembra; but you're always hard on me of late. I don't know why. And I was going to tell you about my reading; if I were compelled to have only two books, I would choose Chaucer and Shakespere; and that is again just because they show me men and women. I don't like conundrums in literature, or wire-drawing, or fog; life isn't long enough to be spent in finding things out—just because the fellow won't speak plain. And then, after all, real men and women are just as interesting to me as those I find in books. When I am going about the streets here I find continual amusement and surprise and occupation.'

'I am very glad of that,' Sabina said in an undertone, so as not to interrupt him.

'Out at the end of the Chain Pier is a splendid place,' he continued. 'Sometimes I go there when I have missed you here; and you see a good deal of human nature about. Sometimes very pretty too. Why, is there anything prettier than to see a young girl—I mean one of those spindle-shanked creatures of twelve or thirteen, with a straw hat and long hair and big clear eyes—is there anything prettier than to see her pet an old lady—an old lady as ugly as the mischief, most likely, with fluffy black clothes, and glass

bugles in her bonnet? Yes, and tease her too; and then put her arm round her and coax her into good-humour again? Or you'll see a purple-faced old sportsman—a real Punjaub jungle-cock—devilled-kidneys-for-breakfast sort of fellow—kind of chap would send blue thunder through his club if his chop were underdone, or overdone, or late, by thirty seconds—you'll see him come walking out with a sickly-white girl in a long couch, and he'll hold the sunshade over her, or read the newspapers to her, and be just like a nurse to her. Then the lads and boys—and sometimes old men—at the fishing. Well, I like to see them at it; they've the true instinct; and they're very earnest about it; though I never see them get anything but a wretched little flounder or an eel. Spooners are not very interesting——'

'I beg your pardon?' said she innocently.

'Lovers, I should say. Well, they're not very interesting; they look so foolish when you chance on them. Besides, it isn't fair; they should be let alone. But I'll tell you what is very funny: to go round the churches on Sunday morning after service has begun, and you generally find outside one or two officials—sometimes a man, sometimes a woman—and they have the most curiously indifferent air on their faces. They look at the sky, they look down the street, they seem to say, "Well, we've done our part of the business; we've shut him up with his audience; he has got to get through the rest of the performance now."'

'But a church is not a theatre,' Sabina said gently.

'Not all of them,' he said; and then fearing to have got on dangerous ground, he pointed out to her that these Sunday morning perambulations were almost a necessity in his case, as he did not like going inside in his Bath-chair.

And so this continual association and intimacy went on; and Sabina was very kind to him (as she was to every one, Janie would have said); and there was distinctly no indifference on his part. One afternoon he was in having tea with them.

'I have a little surprise for you,' he said to Sabina.

'Indeed!'

'My father and mother are coming to London next week, and purpose running down here for a day or two. I hope you will let me introduce them to you; they would be so very much pleased.'

Of course she said it was she who would be pleased; but Mrs. Wygram was struck with a sudden dismay.

'Do you know what he is doing now?' she instantly wrote off to Janie. 'He is bringing his father and mother from Buckinghamshire that Sabie may be introduced to them as his future wife. I am sure of it; I am sure that is what he means. Well, I have held my tongue all this while, but I cannot do so any longer; I must tell the girl what she is bringing on herself. Yes, this very night I will. But I wish you were here, Janie. I am

not very strong just now; and I am all of a tremble when I think of it. Still, what would not one do for Sabie? And I know she is too kind-hearted to take it amiss.'

CHAPTER XII

FLIGHT

But it was a long time before the little woman could screw up her courage; and even at the last moment she fairly jibbed and bolted. Late that night Sabina was in her own room, and leisurely getting ready for bed; she wore a dressing-gown of pale blue and white; and the heavy masses of her golden-brown hair fell loose-flowing and free over her shoulders and down to and below her waist.

'Dear Sabie,' said Mrs. Wygram (though this was not in the least what she wanted to say), 'I would give a hundred pounds if I had it that Walter Lindsay could see you as you are now.'

'Mrs. Wygram!' Sabina exclaimed—but there was not much of ferocity in her virgin pride.

'It would be something for an artist to dream of all his life long,' Mrs. Wygram continued recklessly. 'Do you know, Sabie, you are the only woman I have ever seen who reminds me of Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel." You remember?—

'*Her hair that lay along her back*
Was yellow like ripe corn.'

'I thought my hair was brown,' Sabina said, quietly. 'However, it is not of much consequence. I have no wish to become an artist's model. Besides, you forget that Mr. Lindsay is a landscape painter.'

'But surely you know how wonderful he is in catching likenesses!' the other said. 'Why, the portraits he did of Mrs. Seeley's boys were quite marvellous. Oh yes; there's no reason in the world why he should not do a figure-subject. And I know he was thinking of it. Yes, I know; for I have the scrap of paper he gave Janie, with the quotation for the picture. I believe I have it now.'

She pulled out her purse, and eventually found the litt.e bit of writing. Sabina read the lines aloud—

'See where she sits upon the grassy green
(O seemly sight!)
Yclad in scarlet, like a maiden queen,
And ermines white;
Upon her head a crimson coronet,
With damask roses and daffodillies set.'

'Yes, it sounds picturesque,' Sabina said, in her placid way. 'And whom is he going to paint like that?'

'You.'

'Dear Mrs. Wygram, are you out of your mind?'

'But it's true. He wanted to know whether you would sit to him. Oh, he was so anxious about it, but quite afraid to ask you. Yes; and he said if only Janie could induce you to sit to him, he would do a pencil-drawing

of you, and give it to Janie and me, as a kind of bribe, I suppose.'

'I wonder, now,' said Sabina laughing, 'how many portraits of me you would like to have in Kensington Square.'

'Don't you think we shall be glad to have them, Sabie, when you are no longer there yourself?'

And behold! here was her chance, come quite unexpectedly, and she was bound to face it. Hardly aware of what she was doing, she put her trembling fingers on the girl's arm; and piteous indeed was her tone.

'Dearest Sabie, don't be angry! No, you won't be angry—but I must speak to you—I can't stand by and not say a word—you know I love you, and I am sure we shall always be friends——'

'Now, what is all this about?' Sabina said gently, for she could see how agitated the little woman was.

'Don't you know, then, why Mr. Foster has sent for his father and mother to come to Brighton? Can't you guess? Sabie, it is to introduce you to them as their future daughter-in-law.'

For the briefest moment the girl seemed to draw herself up to her full height, and there was a proud look about her lips; but that instantly disappeared. She put her hand on the trembling hand of her companion, and patted it affectionately.

'My dear friend,' she said, with a smile; 'I see I must put you back on your quinine, and insist on the port wine

at lunch. Your nerves are all wrong—why, you are fluttering at this moment like a caught rabbit—and you let all kinds of ridiculous fancies get into your brain.'

'They are not ridiculous fancies, Sabie! Why will you be so blind? But it all comes from the same thing; you will go on imagining yourself to be an elderly woman—whose business is to pet people and take care of them—whereas the truth is that you are a very dangerously attractive young woman; and I tell you that men don't understand a young woman looking at them in that frank way. In the case of a young married woman it might be different——'

'There again!' said Sabina, with an air of resignation, 'you have told me all that before, dear Mrs. Wygram; and I don't forget that you accused me of flirtation merely because I gave that pretty, yellow-haired boy a rose—in exchange for two sovereigns.'

'Yes; and if that young man is heart-whole at this moment I am very much mistaken,' Mrs. Wygram retorted. 'Why, don't you see how he is always hanging about, just for the chance of saying a word to Mr. Foster, and so being allowed to raise his hat to you?'

'Poor, innocent young thing!'

'Sabie, if you choose to act like a flirt, don't talk like one!' said Mrs. Wygram sharply.

Sabina looked at her.

'No,' she said; 'you can't make me quarrel with you—

I won't do it; for I know you are out of sorts; and I know you mean to be kind; so I can only say that you are quite mistaken. Why, the idea! Mr. Foster and I have been excellent friends simply because I know that no nonsense of that kind would ever enter his head.'

'But hasn't it? I am very much mistaken if it has not,' Mrs. Wygram persisted. 'Sabie, you don't know what an amount of encouragement you have given him. And encouragement from you! I tell you, you don't know your own value. Why should you defer to his opinions—you, who have a hundred times as much brains as he has? And why should a beautiful young woman like you wear things that you think will please him?—oh, but you do, whether you are conscious of it or not. And why should you be interested in stories of racecourses and regattas and cricket; and be entertained with accounts of what happened to him when he was a schoolboy—as if his life, and every moment of it, had been of the utmost value.'

'Poor Mr. Foster!' Sabina interposed. 'There's no one to say a good word for him. If it's in London, it's Janie who keeps saying bitter things about him; and if it's in Brighton, it's you. What has he done to deserve it all—except to be unfortunate? And they used always to say that women had some sympathy for people who were unfortunate; but that was in the old days, I suppose.'

'You can't deceive me, Sabie, though you may be able to deceive yourself.'

'Can't I? Well, at all events, I can put you to bed; and that's what I am going to do now; for I won't have any of my patients sitting up and talking past midnight.'

However, this warning and appeal were not without a certain effect; for naturally a young woman feels somewhat alarmed when she is told that her manner of regarding men is a trifle too audacious. Sabina brazened it out before Mrs. Wygram; but inwardly she was resolved to be a good deal more circumspect. And she wanted to know what it was in Mr. Foster's relations with her that had prompted these wild surmises.

Accordingly, next day, she kept her eyes observant. But what could she see except that he was rather more respectful towards her than he used to be? He did not laugh at her now, nor tease her, nor hint that she was being imposed upon by the poor people she befriended. No; he was rather sympathetic in that direction; only he said he did not like the idea of her going about alone—or with such an insufficient protector as Janie. Indeed, he chose to insist upon this point; though, of course, it was not for a cripple in a Bath-chair to offer to become her guard and champion and ally.

She observed, also, that the stories he told her—and he had always an abundant stock of them, chiefly in connection with the history of the turf—were for the most part not humorous or sarcastic as formerly, but rather tragic and romantic; and that he seemed to have a warm admiration

for Miss Dorothy Vernon and her gay enterprise. On the other hand, how could she suspect him of talking with a purpose when such an incident as the following occurred? They were on the Chain Pier together. He was relating to her the sad history of the fourth Marquis of Hastings, and the reckless struggles of that luckless lad to retrieve his fortunes. Suddenly there was a considerable commotion among the few idlers on the pier; one of the anglers had hooked a large bass; you could see the fish in the clear green water below—tugging and plunging and shooting this way and that; and there was a frantic calling for the landing-net. From that instant the Marquis of Hastings, and Miss Dorothy Vernon, and Miss Sabina Zembra were alike forgotten. He took no more notice of his companion. And when, at last, amid the general rejoicing, the big fish had been hoisted up in the landing-net, and carried off to the weighing machine, and found to scale just over eight pounds, and when the prevailing excitement had quieted down, Sabina had gently to remind him that he had broken off in the midst of a story, and then he could not in the least recollect at what point. Sabina said to herself that it was impossible she could wholly engross his attention when she was so easily dispossessed by an eight-pound fish.

'Sabie,' said Mrs. Wygram that evening, 'do you know that you behaved yourself a little better to-day?'

'I am glad you approve,' Sabina answered. 'But it is

none the pleasanter to have to be continually on the watch with one's friends.'

'Friendship between a young man and a pretty girl,' observed Mrs. Wygram sententiously, 'is all very well in its way, but it wants to have its limits pretty clearly defined. And I think he understands now. He noticed the change in your manner—I could see that he did. And perhaps he is beginning to think that he was a little premature in sending for his father and mother.'

'What nonsense you talk!' said Sabina bluntly. 'I tell you the coming of his father and mother to Brighton has no more to do with me than with the man in the moon.'

'We will see.'

'If I thought such folly were possible, I would go up to London this very evening and send Janie down in my stead. I'm afraid I shall have to do that very soon in any case.'

'But, Sabie, I shall have to go back home too.'

'You? Not you! You won't be allowed to come home until you are ever so much stronger. Janie will take my place here.'

'And what will Mr. Foster do when you are gone, Sabie?'

Sabina was too proud to reply.

But this placid and equable and eventless life was far too pleasant to last. Mr. Fred Foster's father and mother arrived in due course, and were installed in the rooms he had provided for them; and the same afternoon he brought

them along to call on Mrs. Wygram and Sabina. He seemed a little anxious and nervous. But if he was at all concerned about the impression likely to be produced on the old lady by the young girl, or *vice versâ*, he must have been speedily reassured. At the very first glance—while as yet this tall, thin, elegant-looking woman, with the short white curls, and apple-tinted cheeks, and soft gray eyes, had hardly entered the room—Sabina had formed a liking for her; and that was only confirmed by the singular air of refinement and graciousness of manner that seemed to surround her as she came forward. And on her side? She took the girl's hand in hers and held it; apparently she was unable to utter a word; but as she read all that that clear, beautiful, youthful face had to say to her, her eyes quickly filled with tears. Sabina was frightened—she scarcely knew why; she managed to say a few commonplace words of welcome; and then she turned to give a similar greeting to the old gentleman. As for him, it was pretty evident that he considered the whole proceeding a bore. As soon as he decently could he withdrew from the lot of them, and went to the window and stared out there, with his hands behind him, over the tails of his highly respectable black frock-coat.

But the old lady was sitting next Sabina, and had drawn her chair very close; and she seemed unable to keep her eyes—which were kind and affectionate eyes—away from the girl. And she said that she knew her quite well already,

so much had Fred written home about her; and how was she to thank Miss Zembra for all her goodness to him when he was shut up a prisoner in Lancaster Gate?—and how fortunate it was for him to have had so much of her companionship during his stay at the seaside. There was a great deal to talk about; but all through it the old lady's glances were gently scrutinising the various points of the girl's appearance, and her costume too—the beautiful line of the neck and shoulders, her hair, the trimness of her cuffs, the neatness of her brooch and collar, the slender, tapering, but large hand, the gracious arch of the eyebrow—and the more that old Mrs. Foster looked, the more and more did pleasure sit beaming upon her own face. Once or twice she touched Sabina's arm, and her fingers seemed to linger there. She followed her every word eagerly; she laughed when there was the least occasion; delight and tenderness shone in the soft gray eyes.

The old gentleman came back from the window, and rather brusquely remarked that it was a pity to waste so fine an afternoon within doors, as he had never seen Brighton, and there seemed to be plenty to see. His wife rose reluctantly; and now she held Sabina by both hands, and seemed loth to leave her.

'Good-bye, dear,' she said; and still she held her hands a little; and then with an impulse of affection, she kissed the girl—kissed her on both cheeks—and said good-bye again, and went away.

When they had gone, Sabina walked once or twice up and down the room, in a curiously agitated manner, and then came back.

'Mrs. Wygram, tell me—tell me what I have said or done—oh, you may say any harm of me you like!—but have I done or said anything wrong?—what do they mean?'

Mrs. Wygram was not one to seek a cheap triumph.

'I think it is quite clear they came to Brighton to make your acquaintance, Sabie,' she said gently.

'Yes, but why? Why did she kiss me like that?—a stranger! Why did she talk about their home in Buckinghamshire, as if she expected me to be there at any time?' And then Sabina's cheeks reddened angrily. 'What has Mr. Foster been saying about me to them? What right has he to speak about me? If I have done anything—if I have done anything I should not have done—I—I will apologise—but they have no right—they have no right—to speak about me.'

And here she burst out crying, which was a very unusual thing for her to do; and of course the next moment Mrs. Wygram's arms were round the girl's neck, and she was being soothed and pacified with all kinds of endearing phrases.

'Sabie, darling, be sure he said nothing about you but what was perfectly kind—perhaps too kind. And if there has been any mistake it can easily be put right. Perhaps the mistake is ours—I hope it is. You see, you do make

people affectionate towards you. Perhaps she did not mean anything.'

'Anyway,' Sabina said quickly, 'I am going up to London to-night.'

'You cannot do that!' her friend said instantly. 'Why, it would be a confession! It would look as if you were ashamed, and had run away!' And then the little woman's courage rose. 'And what has my beautiful Sabie to be ashamed of? I say—nothing! Haven't I been with you all the time? Let them come to me if they like—but you are not going to run away for anybody.'

All doubts, however, as to the meaning of the old people's visit to Brighton were set at rest next morning. Mrs. Foster called about eleven, and asked to be allowed to see Sabina alone. Mrs. Wygram went upstairs.

And very gently, and skilfully, and affectionately did this ambassador disclose her mission. Her 'poor boy,' as she called him, had something of great importance to say to Sabina; but in his present crippled state he had never a chance of seeing her by herself; and would she take it amiss if he had asked his mother to come and plead for him?

'And for myself, dear,' said this soft-voiced diplomatist. 'If you knew how proud I should be to call you my daughter!'

Sabina had grown very white.

'Dear child, are you ill?' the other exclaimed, 'shall I get you some water?'

'No, no, no,' the girl said; and she was striving to be quite calm. 'I am very, very sorry, but there has been some mistake. I feared it. After you came yesterday I asked Mrs. Wygram if I had done anything——'

'It's not what you have done, it's what you are,' the old lady said, and she took the girl's hand. 'You are pretty and you are good; can you wonder at the rest?'

Sabina withdrew her hand.

'I see you are afraid of me,' Mrs. Foster said smiling. 'Perhaps it was foolish of the boy to send me here to do his wooing for him. You think I should make a harsh mother-in-law to you.'

'I am sure you will be very kind to whoever your son marries,' Sabina managed to say, and with truth she said it.

'Then may I tell him that when he can come and speak for himself there will be some hope for him? I think he would be satisfied even with that.'

'Oh no, no, no; say anything but that!' Sabina said, but she seemed scarcely to understand the meaning of her words. 'No, no, that is impossible. It was not that I was thinking of. Tell him I am so very sorry for this dreadful mistake. I hope I was not—too—thoughtless; but, yes, I suppose that was it; and now what can I do? I am very, very sorry—tell him I hope he will forgive me——'

'I see I distress you,' the old lady said, and she rose

from her chair. 'But remember you have only refused me; you have not refused him. Perhaps it was my rude way of asking; and he may be more successful; and no one, no one would be happier than I, should that time ever come, my dear.'

She kissed her again before she left.

'Remember that, my dear; I shall be a proud woman if ever I have to call you my daughter.'

Sabina went hurriedly to Mrs. Wygram. She was very pale; but apparently quite businesslike and collected.

'What you said has come true. I am going up to London, and I will send Janie down to-night. I could not bear to meet them again.'

'But, Sabie,' Mrs. Wygram protested, for she could guess what underlay this forced quietude of manner, 'you are going away with a quite exaggerated notion of what has happened!'

'I am not. Well, perhaps I don't understand yet all that has happened. But I wish I had taken your warning earlier. I did not know.'

Sabina arrived in Kensington Square between three and four, and bade Janie pack up and get away to Brighton as quickly as possible. But something in her look, and perhaps also in her coming to town so unexpectedly, awoke Janie's suspicions.

'What is the matter? Sabie—Sabie, you have not promised to marry Mr. Foster?'

There was a cry of appeal in her voice.

'I have refused him,' was Sabina's answer. 'And I have covered myself with shame. But I hardly understand all that has happened, and—and—don't ask me any more, Janie!'

Janie's preparations for her departure were necessarily hurried, but still she could think of her friend. Now Walter Lindsay, not content with sending Sabina a sketch from the Shannon, had also painted a small replica of the landscape she had admired in his studio, and in her absence had forwarded it to Kensington Square. It was now lying in the parlour. Amid all her hurry Janie found time to go and get hold of that little picture, and carry it swiftly and stealthily up to Sabina's room, where she placed it in a prominent position on the mantel-shelf. It would be the first thing Sabina must see when she opened the door.

CHAPTER XIII

REPENTANCE

It is hardly to be imagined that a beautiful and healthy young woman should have attained to the age of five and twenty without experiencing, at some time or other, and especially in her earlier years, certain tender preferences for members of the opposite sex; but these love-fancies, if they may be so called, had in Sabina's case been quickly absorbed in the cares and active interests of a particularly busy existence. Her character was robust and independent; she had little time for sentimental musings. Marriage had never entered into her scheme of life. Then she had seen one after another of her companions retire into the realm of matronhood, leaving her pretty much alone; and she had to deal with an ever-increasing amount of business about training-ships, convalescent homes, philanthropic societies, and the like; and it is quite probable, as Mrs. Wygram maintained, that these occupations of hers, and the almost maternal authority she had frequently to exercise in the households of the poor and sickly and indigent, had taught her a certain brusqueness and directness of

manner, as of one who was too much engaged with the practical needs of the world around her to pay much attention to the refinements of etiquette. But when Mrs. Wygram plainly accused her of being a downright flirt, Sabina was entirely startled out of her self-complacency; and when, closely following upon that, Mr. Foster made her an indirect offer of marriage, thereby incurring the pain and mortification of a refusal, there was no end to her self-reproach. It was true, then, that she had acted with an indiscretion visible to all onlookers? It was true that she had encouraged him to believe she was willing to be his wife? What would he think of her? What would his mother think of her? She recalled the patient and gentle grace and dignity of the old lady; the evident and affectionate hope that was in all her words and looks; her promises of kindness; and she could imagine the mother going back to the son and breaking the truth to him in her delicately considerate fashion. Well, there was one woman who had never deceived him. 'The only son of his mother,' he would at least retain his faith in her—the faith that he was so openly proud of. And he would forget that he had ever been trifled with by a flirt.

Now Sabina never did a more foolish thing in her life than when she came away from Brighton. Had she remained there, her remorse and self-abasement would have been largely mitigated. She would have discovered that Mr. Foster's grief over his disappointment was not of

a crushing nature. He was annoyed, it is true; but he was annoyed chiefly by the grumblings of his father, who considered that he had been dragged away hither on a fool's errand. Mr. Fred Foster was of a cheerful temperament; despondency was not much in his way.

'We haven't pulled it off this time, mother,' said he; 'but wait till you see me on my legs again. You could hardly expect a high-stepper like that to get matched with a broken-down old cripple in a paddock.'

'If I live to see you married to a girl like Miss Zembra, Freddie,' said the gentle mother, 'I shall be happy. A girl like that would have a good influence over you; you would give up your wild life. And I am sure your father and I would be glad to let you have the old house; we could do very well at Crookfield.'

'You need not count on me. I should be no such fool,' the elder Mr. Foster remarked, with some point.

Mr. Fred Foster chose to ignore this chance observation.

'Oh, don't you make any mistake, mother; Miss Zembra isn't a prig at all. She is just as fond of fun as anybody; only she has never had a chance. Why, she herself told me how well she liked looking on at some dancing there was at an artist-fellow's house—I forget the name—and she said it was quite fine to see a lot of young people — that's the way she talks, you know — romping about and dancing the Highland schottische and enjoying themselves without restraint. Oh, there's nothing of

the stuck-up school miss about her, I can assure you.'

'I do not think I should like to see Miss Zembra dancing the Highland schottische,' the old lady said quietly, 'though I hardly know why.'

'No, no,' said he with a laugh, 'nothing less dignified than the minuet in Ariadne. Well, I don't know that I should care to see her romping about either. But I'll tell you what I should like to see—I should like to see her drive a dogcart up to Ascot Heath, two ponies tandem; wouldn't that be something like the thing? And on the lawn, mother—just think of her on the lawn—why, there isn't one of them would be in it with her! Think of her figure—I tell you there's not one of the women would be in it with her—except, perhaps, Lady ——, and she doesn't go to race-meetings any more, since that thing happened. Well, do you know, mother, I don't think you would grumble at a little extravagance—a good figure wants good style—and the fashions have to be paid for——'

'My dear,' said the old lady, with the least touch of remonstrance in her placid voice, 'you speak very confidently.'

'Oh,' said he lightly, 'that is a fancy picture, you know. But I am not so sure it won't come off. Of course, I have received my snub, and must grin and bear it; but while there's life there's hope.'

Sabina had but little idea that he was accepting the situation in this cheerful frame of mind; and she was alone

in London; and she was very miserable. For she had a vague conviction that some kind of calamity had occurred, for which she was mainly responsible; and her wrong-doing was none the less distressing that it was so hard to define. She kept thinking and thinking over it; wondering what Mrs. Wygram was saying to Janie about it; hoping that Mr. Foster was not too deeply offended with her. Had she sent him sufficient assurance of her sorrow over this hapless mistake? Would it not have been kinder if she had seen him—to say a word of good-bye? And the beautiful and gentle old lady who had asked her in so pleasing a way to become her daughter: ought she not to sit down and write to her and make some excuses for her running away?

Sabina was very busy on these first days of her return to London; but she went about her duties with a preoccupied air. It struck even herself that she had less self-confidence somehow in addressing people—even those best known to her and most dependent on her. But she guessed that might be the effect of her long holiday; she had come back strange to her work; she had not fallen into the way of it yet.

Either Mrs. Wygram or her daughter wrote to their beloved Sabie every day. This was professedly a medical report; but of course it contained all the news of their uneventful life at the seaside. And it seemed unaccountable to Sabina that neither of them should ever make the least mention of Mr. Foster. Why she wished to hear

about him she did not ask herself; but each letter that came from Brighton she opened quickly; and each time there was an undefined feeling of disappointment that never a word was said about him. About the mother and father she had heard; the old people had left a couple of days or so after her departure—Mrs. Foster calling at Regency Square and leaving some very affectionate messages for Miss Zembra. But never the least allusion to the young man; and Sabina, though writing every other day, somehow did not choose to ask.

The reason why Janie had nothing to say about Mr. Foster was simply this: she had learned from her mother what were his principal haunts, and she took care that her mother and herself should keep away from these. They never went out to the end of the West Pier nor to the end of the Chain Pier; and they seldom went into the Old Steyne Enclosures or the Pavilion Gardens. For Janie's vague dislike for the young man had developed into something like hatred when she heard that he had attempted to carry off Sabina from them; and that attempt having been fortunately frustrated, she was resolved that it would not be through her mother and herself that any communications should be resumed. And she was delighted to see that Sabina never even mentioned his name. She had feared the worst from the curious interest that Sabina seemed to take in the character and fortunes of the stranger whom chance had thrown in her way. But that was all over now.

He had been sent about his business. Sabina was back in London; and sooner or later Walter Lindsay would be calling in at Kensington Square to see Mr. Wygram.

Brighton is a small place; Janie was caught at last. Her mother had lain down for a while after lunch; the daughter had come out for a bit of a stroll, and had wandered down to the sea-front, where she took a seat on one of the benches. A passing Bath-chair was stopped for a moment just as it reached her.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Wygram, but I'm afraid you've forgotten me?'

She thought it was an intolerable piece of effrontery that he should speak to her after what had happened, but she could not be positively rude.

'How do you do, Mr. Foster?' she said, and she gave him her hand for a moment. 'I hope you are getting on well.'

'Oh yes, very well,' he said cheerfully. 'I can move about a little now, indoors. I think the Derby week will see me on my legs again. And how is Miss Zembra; I suppose you have heard from her?'

And then it flashed upon her that he was assuming she knew nothing of what had occurred, for how else could he dare to talk about Sabina in this free-and-easy fashion?

'Oh yes, I hear from her frequently; she is very well, I believe. What a pleasant afternoon for going about!'

If this was not an intimation to him that he might move on she did not know what was. But he remained.

'I have found it very different since she left,' said he, with a rueful smile,—'very different indeed. I had no idea we had been such constant companions until she left. Brighton seems quite deserted now. You see, you get into the habit of meeting people in a place like this, one day being just like the day before it, and you don't notice, perhaps, how much you are thrown together. But you find out when they leave.'

'Yes?' said Janie; which was rather cold encouragement.

'And I'm awfully sorry she went away so hurriedly,' he continued (and Janie wished he would not stare at her so uncompromisingly with his clear, hard, blue eyes). 'I don't mind telling you there was a kind of—kind of—well, something happened that might have admitted of some explanation if only she had not gone away so abruptly. I was awfully sorry—if I could have seen her for merely a couple of minutes I could have explained a lot. Yes; and there's another thing I wanted to say to her before she went back to London—well, it was talked about occasionally here—but I wanted to impress it on her—don't you think she ought to look about for some male companion—I suppose she could not afford a secretary?—but some male companion, anyway, to go with her through all those slums?'

'Miss Zembra,' said Janie distantly (for she was not going to call her 'Sabie' to *him*), 'only goes to places where she is known; besides, she can take care of herself.'

'Oh, I do not mean in that way,' he said, and he accepted her repellent attitude with much good nature; perhaps he did not notice it. 'I mean in the way of her getting sharped. I imagine she is imposed on by a whole crowd of cringing, fawning, sneaking wretches. If a man were to go with her he would let a little daylight into the whole affair.'

'You think he would get to know more about these people than she could?' Janie asked. 'I suppose you are not aware, then, that Miss Zembra is a member of the Charity Organisation Society?'

'But she is a woman.'

'A woman may have as sharp eyes as a man.'

'But she is sure to have a softer heart—and that's where the trouble comes in.'

Janie remained obdurate. Even that little bit of adroit flattery had no effect on her. And Mr. Foster, seeing that she was not inclined for further conversation, left a friendly message for her mother, and passed on.

That evening's despatch to Sabina could not well omit all mention of this interview; but Janie had no scruples whatever about sending a distinctly garbled version.

'He seemed as cheerful and complacent as you could

wish,' she wrote, amongst other things; 'and put all the blame on you for having gone away so hurriedly. Everything could have been put right by an explanation. I suppose he means he could have explained why it was absolutely necessary you should become his wife. And he was kind enough to say that Brighton felt quite lonely now that you had gone, and that he had no idea you and he had been so much together. I suppose because he had not taken the trouble to notice.'

This letter—the animus of which she well understood and could discard—set Sabina still further wondering. What explanation could he mean? And so he had been looking back over their companionship together, and perhaps valuing it a little? And she was glad that he was putting so brave a face on his disappointment; for she assumed that there must have been some disappointment: a man does not ask a woman to be his wife without having seriously thought it over and laid far-reaching plans and cherished hopes that he is anxious to have fulfilled. And, of course, so important a choice is a great honour to confer upon any girl; and one not lightly or ungratefully to be thrown aside. What explanation was it? she asked herself again and again. She knew that he was not a sentimental person; but then neither was she herself; perhaps she ought to have waited, and listened to what he had to say, and been less discourteous in her summary refusal.

It may have been this continual questioning of herself

that caused Sabina, one afternoon as she was going down through Kensington Square, to pass Walter Lindsay without recognition. He had not been so blind. He had seen her a long way off; and it was as if something had suddenly grasped his heart and made it cease to beat. He did not know she had returned to London. He was not prepared. The calm and equable friendship he had promised himself was not there with its quieting influence; and he only knew that the sight of Sabina advancing towards him—the real Sabina—here in Kensington Square—in Kensington Square that he had peopled so often with ghosts and visions of her—this actual thing bewildered him out of his senses, and he could not think what he was to say to her. How was he to account for her being in Kensington Square at all? Was some one ill that she had so suddenly come back? She would be startled and displeased at confronting him so unexpectedly?

Sabina came along, all unheeding. She was not looking at any one whom she might meet; her eyes were absorbed. And when she passed him, he was still silent, almost fearing to disturb her; but the next moment something within him took control of him, and he advanced a quick step or two.

'Miss Zembra!'

She turned with a little start; but the moment she saw who it was, there was a quick outshining of friendliness from the beautiful eyes, and a pleasant smile of welcome.

She had been much harassed and worried these last few days; she had been almost alone; here was an old friend who had been kind to her many a time. And she did not know that she allowed him to retain her hand while they were mutually asking and answering the usual preliminary questions (perhaps he did not know it either); and she took no pains to conceal the pleasure with which she recognised him; and her eyes met his with a frankness that took no thought of consequences. In short, during these few seconds, her conduct was abominable, Mrs. Wygram would have said; but Mrs. Wygram was altogether forgotten in the surprise and gladness of this unexpected meeting.

'You are going down that way?' he said, looking towards the end of the Square.

'Yes. I am going down to Cornwall Gardens. It is not often I pay afternoon calls; but I am to meet an old admiral who has been of great service to me several times, and I shall have plenty of opportunity to thank him—that is, to beg for future favours.'

'May I walk as far with you?'

'If you like,' she said without hesitation, 'if it is not out of your way.'

And here he was actually walking side by side with Sabina along the Kensington Square pavement, as many and many a time he had vainly imagined and pictured to himself. And what a tragic thing it was that he could only talk

to her about trivial matters—about Brighton lodging-houses, and the crowds at South Kensington of an evening, and the various gossip of the studios—when all the time he was dying to tell her of the newly-established relationship, the unalterable and perfect friendship that was to last between these two for ever and ever and evermore. Of course he could not tell her; for she knew of no other relationship—and had probably never dreamed of any; and so he had to pretend to be eagerly interested in training-ships and the like; while all the pleasant and amusing things he had been storing up for her during these many weeks had gone clean out of his head. No matter; Sabina was about as close to him as she had been in the hansom; and he was keeping step with her as well as he could; and bending towards her a little so that he could listen to her the more easily; and sometimes he succeeded in making her laugh, and her laugh was pleasant to hear. And he knew that for him thenceforth this Victoria Road would be a blessed thoroughfare; he and she together had passed underneath the overhanging trees of those front gardens; for him at least the place would be for ever haunted.

Nor even when she had passed within the hated portals of that house in Cornwall Gardens was he likely to quit the neighbourhood so long as she was there. Of course he could not wait and offer to escort her back home again, if home she was going; that would have been too significant; but he could linger unobserved until she came out, and

have at least a last glimpse of her. And that was all he obtained; for on Sabina's coming out of the house she took the first cab she saw, and was driven away, he knew not whither.

But he was happy enough; nay, his heart was filled with rejoicing. Nor would he go northward by Victoria Road and Kensington Square; the way they had come seemed to him still rich with the glory of her presence; he would not go and see how empty the thoroughfares looked. No, he went away in another direction altogether; and eventually, after many aimless turnings and wanderings, found himself towards seven o'clock out in the Addison Road neighbourhood, and at the door of the studio of an old chum of his.

This Willie Meteyard was rather celebrated in his way as having been an unconscionable number of times on the very edge of being elected to the Academy, and failing at the last moment through some unexpected combination; but he took these disappointments very equably, and worked away at his pictures of Irish peasant-life with an assiduity which brought him a fair amount of fame, and the dealers a large amount of money. He was a bachelor; and he was sitting down to a bachelor-dinner when Walter Lindsay entered. Artists as a rule are not overexacting in their needs; there was soon another plate on the table.

'What are you going to do to-night, Willie?' the visitor, asked.

'I'm going with those Mowbray girls and their mother to the theatre.'

'You'll have to dress and get away immediately, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'What a nuisance! You'd much better stop where you are; and we'll go into the studio, and have a pipe and some music.'

Now Mr. Meteyard was much fonder of music than of the theatre; and he knew that when Lindsay got into the vein, he played very well indeed, and with quite unusual feeling. Besides, Lindsay was an old friend; and the Mowbrays were mere acquaintances; the promise was not a very definite one; there was a large party going to the theatre; and he would not be missed. Finally, he wanted to stop—and he stopped.

The evening passed pleasantly enough; though by degrees the two friends ceased from music, and took mostly to smoking and lounging and chatting in the comfortable hushed studio. And, of course, Walter Lindsay had but one subject, to which he returned again and again, by many subterfuges; and that subject, of course, was the beautiful nature and disposition of Miss Zembra, and the ennobling effect of an assured friendship with such a woman; the influence it must have on one's character, and on one's work too, making it sincere and earnest, and of a lofty aim —all of which Willie Meteyard had heard a few times before. At last he said:

'Look here, Walter, my good fellow, let's have an end of this. It's no use your trying to humbug me. All your talk about friendship is pure idiotcy. I tell you I believe what you say of the girl. I suppose it's quite true. But I tell you this as well—and it's as plain as a pikestaff to every one but yourself—I tell you, you're just madly in love with her.'

CHAPTER XIV

A ROSE-DECORATED BALL

To name a thing is nothing; other people might call it love if they liked; he was content to regard it as a beautiful and ideal friendship; and he could have wished that this was the fourteenth century; and London, Florence; and that a certain chosen band of charming ladies and young gentlemen might retire to a small and fair domain without the city, there to walk in cool gardens and fragrant meadows, singing songs and telling stories, weaving garlands of flowers, and dancing to the dulcet strains of lute and viol—all to show to the world that perfect and frank good comradeship might innocently and advantageously exist between unmarried men and maidens. In the meantime, he was neither in Florence nor in the fourteenth century; and, indeed, he was too much occupied with the one and sole and consuming question as to how he should manage to see Sabina again to waste much thinking over impracticabilities.

But afternoon calls were useless, for Sabina was rarely at home in the daytime; haunting the neighbourhood of Kensington Square was tantalising beyond endurance; and

not until Mrs. Wygram came back from Brighton could he hope for an invitation to spend an evening with them. Was there no other way? For this constant desire to meet her again—if only for a few minutes, just to see how she was looking, and hear her voice—banished every other thought and fancy from his brain; and he neglected his work; and his ordinary companions had but little interest for him; and London became at once a delight and a torture to him—knowing, as he did, that Sabina was somewhere within the vast extent of it; and from morning till night he kept vainly guessing at her probable whereabouts. All this was friendship of a very exalted and devoted character, he knew; still, it was friendship.

One afternoon he went down to the house of a famous Academician, and found the mistress of the mansion at home. There were a few visitors present; and when they rose to leave he remained; he wanted to have a little private conversation with Mrs. Mellord.

'Why,' said he, when they had gone, 'from what I hear, the whole of London is coming to you on the 22d.'

'Oh no, no—only a few friends,' she said (all hostesses say the like). 'We shall be very quiet—don't you be frightened away——'

'Oh, I am coming, of course,' he said.

'I have got some pretty women,' she observed encouragingly (and she herself was charming enough, both in appearance and manner).

'You always do have pretty women at your house,' he said. 'Don't you know that other people are a little bit jealous? How do you manage it? They're not too fond of shining side by side. They like to be solitary stars. Well, now—eh—I wanted to ask you if you had sent a card to the Wygrams.'

'The Wygrams?' she repeated, with the least touch of surprise. 'I don't think I did, then.'

'Oh, but you ought,' he made bold to say (for he was on very friendly terms with this pretty Mrs. Mellord). 'Oh yes, you must—a kindness, you know—auld lang syne——'

'I should hardly have thought it was in their way,' she said, still looking rather puzzled. And then something seemed to strike her; and she regarded the young man with shrewd and demurely smiling eyes. 'I suppose you mean that Miss Zembra should be included?'

'Miss Zembra?' he answered; and he took up an Egyptian scent-burner and affected to be deeply interested in the potter's handiwork. 'Well, yes, I understand she is still living with them. I don't know that she would care to come —probably not. She would want some persuasion, I suppose, if you were kind enough to ask her. However, if you want another pretty woman, there is one. Of course, as I say, she would have to be persuaded—she doesn't often go out —but you could tell her, for example, that she ought to go out from time to time—seeing how rich people enjoy and amuse themselves should sharpen her sympathy with those

poor people she works among—you might put it that way, if you thought it worth while asking her.'

Mrs. Mellord burst out laughing.

'Do you know, Mr. Lindsay, that you are a very admirable actor? Of course it is not you who want Miss Zembra to be here on the 22d. Oh, no! And your air of indifference—excellent! Do you think I have heard nothing?—with all the town talking about your infatuation for Miss Sabina!'

He reddened to the temples.

'I was not aware there were so many idiots in the world.'

'Don't be angry,' said his friend, placidly. 'They might have coupled your name with a plainer girl. Now let us understand each other. Supposing I go to Miss Zembra, and talk her over, and get her to come here, perhaps you would like to take her in to supper?'

He looked up quickly, but she did not give him time to speak.

'I suppose you would not object. Well, then, everybody says that Herr Borella is a great chum of yours. I saw him the other night, and he refused to come to me on the 22d—the flimsiest excuse you ever heard; do you think you can induce him to change his mind?'

'I know I can.'

'And will you get him to sing?'

'Certainly.'

'For, don't you see, I am not going to sacrifice the whole

night to you boys and girls. I must have some little amusement for the elderly people; and I am going to have distinct intervals between the dances, and have music—songs, I mean, for no one listens to anything else. Well, then, I have got Madame Secchi, and Angelica Russell, and Isidore, and one or two others; and I want your friend Borella as well.'

'Oh, that's all right,' he said promptly.

'You really think you will get him to sing for me?'

'I'll make him sing.'

'Because,' said pretty Mrs. Mellord, gravely, and she regarded the young man with eyes that meant a good deal, 'in that case, I think out of sheer gratitude I must do my best to persuade Miss Zembra.'

The 22d was a long way off yet, however; and in the interval the Wygrams came home from Brighton. During this time he encountered the sympathetic Janie occasionally; but saw very little of Sabina, who was busy with her multifarious duties; so that all the more he looked forward to the evening on which he was to meet her at Mrs. Mellord's. And always with the tacit assumption that he was to have the monopoly of her society on that occasion. Had it not been so at his own house on that memorable night? Sabina was his companion all the way through; at supper she had sat on his right hand and talked almost exclusively to him; in the studio the others were free to dance, or listen to music, or amuse themselves as they chose; Sabina and he

were apart and together. And as it was then, so it would be now; for who else had such a claim on her?

And at last came the night of the ball; and it was the very height of the London season; and as carriage after carriage drove up to Mrs. Mellord's house, the crowd on the pavement had more or less distant glimpses of very distinguished people indeed — a generally recognised face causing a little murmur of comment—and of the less-known womenfolk who stepped along under the awning in the lightest and palest of summer cloaks and hoods. And pleasant it was on this hot June night to pass into the spacious hall of white and black marble; and fresh and cool looked the tall ferns that went all the way round the walls; and there was a grateful flashing of the central fountain, where a ghost-white alabaster swan floated motionless in the middle of a miniature lake. But from the hall upwards and onwards there was no decoration but roses. Ropes of roses adorned the staircase; festoons of roses hung above the doors; masses of roses gave colour to the pale gold ballroom; and on the supper-table—as yet concealed from the public eye—lay a bed of red roses from end to end. Everywhere there was a scent of roses; and a sound of music too, for the dancing had begun; and pretty Mrs. Mellord, at the head of the staircase, was already becoming anxious that the people should disperse a little, and not crowd so obstinately round the ballroom door.

Walter Lindsay was not in that ballroom. No; he

was in the spacious hall below, lounging about with Willie Meteyard, and pretending to listen to him. The subject of their talk was etching, ordinarily a sufficiently attractive topic for most artists; and Meteyard was most enthusiastic about a wonder-working press he had just purchased. Somehow or other, however, Walter Lindsay's attention was but intermittent. He looked anxious. He kept glancing towards the wide-open doorway, and to the brilliant crowd that came slowly pouring in. And at last, with a sudden 'See you by and by,' he abruptly left his companion and made for a certain small group that had just arrived.

Sabina (so tall she seemed; and to him she appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of white gauze—but that was because he had no eyes for anything but her face and the possible look of welcome he might find there) was apparently a little surprised to meet him.

'In London still?' she said, in her direct way. 'Why are you not in the country, at work?'

He stammered some excuse.

'And you might well ask what brings *us* here,' she added, with a smile; 'but Janie wanted to see the roses.'

They passed into the cloak-room. He was very nervous while awaiting them. He wanted to get possession of Sabina from the first—to establish a right of companionship that no one could interfere with. And what if they were to be separated on the crowded staircase, or if she were to be

snatched away from him on her entrance into the rooms above? It suddenly occurred to him that he was in a manner helpless. In his own home, with Sabina as his guest, he could do what he liked. He could choose her seat for her, take her hither and thither, and generally assume charge of her. But here, in another person's house, he had no such control; all sorts of untoward accidents might happen; wild beasts (in the shape of strangers wanting introductions) would be waiting upstairs to devour her. And what had he come for if Sabina were to be spirited away?

However, when the women reappeared, it was very evident that Sabina had no intention of ignoring the claims of old friendship. She came forward to him quite frankly, appeared to take it for granted he was waiting for them, and went up the staircase with him, these two together, and Janie looking on with marked approval.

'I wish Mr. Foster could see them now,' she said in an undertone to her mother.

'You know,' Sabina said to her companion, 'we are going away quite early. I cannot have all the good that Brighton did to Mrs. Wygram undone again. Wasn't it kind of her to take all the trouble about bringing us here to-night? But Janie was so anxious to see the pretty rooms; and then Mrs. Mellord is a very persuasive woman—when she sets her mind on a thing——'

'Oh,' said he, 'I will take you where you will see every-

thing without getting crushed. I know you don't care much about dancing, Miss Zembra, and I don't either; why, I detest it—in this hot weather—in a crowd——'

But they were now arrived at the head of the staircase. Mrs. Mellord was not much surprised to find Walter Lindsay appear at the same time with Miss Zembra; and she gave both of them and the Wygrams a pleasant greeting; only she took occasion, as she pressed Mr. Lindsay's hand slightly, to say, 'Borella is here, and has already sung twice. You are a very good boy.'

Now as Walter Lindsay was familiar with this house, and as all the rooms on this floor were *en suite*, he found no difficulty in taking his little party by a roundabout way to a corner where they could have a commanding view. And a very pretty sight it was: the pale-hued walls, the brilliant lights, the masses and ropes and festoons of roses; young English girls showing further roses in their cheeks, their eyes vivid with the animation of a waltz; dowagers gorgeous in velvet and satin and diamonds; here and there in the 'general circle,' if one may use the phrase, the resplendent costume of a dusky Indian prince, or the quieter garments of a group of Chinese officials looking on with impassive stare. Perhaps, indeed, the 'general circle' was more interesting to the ordinary observer than the industrious young men and maidens who were engaged in the active business of the evening; for there were many famous folk here; and, luckily for Lindsay's companions, his acquaintance was

not confined to mere painters and poets and people of that kind. However, they were not suffered to remain long in this quiet corner. The son of the house had espied them; a quadrille was being formed; he brought along a partner, and introduced him to Janie. Janie was a good girl, and told no lie; only she threw a little despairing glance towards Sabina.

'Won't you come in, Sabie?' she said.

'Will you?' said Walter Lindsay quickly.

'Oh yes,' was the placid answer.

And so before he knew what he was about he found himself engaged to dance with Sabina; and quite inadvertently he took her hand so as to put her in proper position; and his heart was beating pretty quickly; and the music that had now begun made a fervour in his brain, so that the little speeches he made to her were rather incoherent. Fortunately they were 'sides;' and in the period of waiting, Sabina looked on calm and bland and placid. When it came to their turn she went through the various evolutions with a simplicity and ease and grace that entirely surprised him, and wrought him a more deadly woe than ever. Was it her beautiful figure, then, that caused her slightest movement to appear so fine and finished? And then she was so gentle and dignified in her self-possession; and Janie's eyes, as he could see, were full of admiring pride; she seemed to be saying, 'Is not our beautiful Sabie perfect in everything she does?' And, of course, he pretended to have forgotten the figures in order to have information given him in an

undertone; and he rather lingered in letting go her hand when they returned to their places; and he, too, spoke to her in an undertone, as if to shut away the outer world. But alas! this close companionship could not last for ever; the music and the dancing ceased, and he had to take her back to Mrs. Wygram. It was Perdita he was thinking of, and Florizel's speech to her: 'What you do still betters what is done. . . . When you do dance, I wish you a wave o' the sea, that you might ever do nothing but that.' Only this was rather a tall and stately Perdita, though her manner was gracious enough.

Madame Secchi was now singing the 'Casta Diva' air from *Norma;* but he did not listen attentively; he was busy with the fear that that officious young Mellord would presently be bringing along some partner and stealing Sabina away from him. And he was resolved that no such thing should occur. So he charged them not to move from their present position; and slipped away through the crowd and reached his hostess.

'Mrs. Mellord,' said he, 'are you going to be awfully good to me?'

'I always am,' was the prompt reply.

'Yes; but this time especially?'

'What is it?'

'Miss Zembra and the Wygrams are not going to stay late, and I want to show them the supper-room; I've heard about the roses. May I take them in?'

'The candles are not lit yet.'

'Oh, but there will be some kind of light.'

'Very well, then.' And then she looked at him with laughing but friendly eyes. 'Promise to be grateful to me all your life. I will let you give them supper now, if you can find any.'

'No; may I?'

'But get the servants to put the table straight—don't forget that.'

And right gladly and swiftly he went back to his friends; the music had not yet finished; Sabina was still there.

'Come along,' said he, 'I am commissioned by Mrs. Mellord to take you into the supper-room—before any one else goes in—come along!'

And then he bundled them away, and guided them across the upper hall, and opened the ponderous rosewood door, and ushered them into this long, dimly-lit chamber. But even these few lamps showed what a beautiful room it was—the abundance of flowers, the silver candelabra, the crystal and china making the table very pretty indeed. Then it was cool and quiet and mysterious; there was no servant of any kind near; they were as children who had stolen into some forbidden place. Of course the women-folk would not hear of his attempting to get them any supper. Would he disarrange that beautiful table? They could get some refreshment, if they wanted any, in the other room.

Then said Janie, 'Mother, Sabie is tired after her long

day's work. Let her stop here—in the cool. We will go back and look at the dancing.'

Sabina was nothing loth; this room was indeed much less hot than the others; he had got her a comfortable chair; and, when she had time, she enjoyed laziness luxuriously. What did she talk to him about? It seemed a matter of little concern to her. He was all eagerness to interest her—about a dozen different subjects; but she answered as if the mysterious lights, and the cool atmosphere, and the scent of the roses were enough for her. She lay a little back in her chair; the solitary diamond in the slender necklace round her throat flashed from time to time; she never raised her eyes to his; she seemed content —and blandly indifferent.

But there was a growing wildness in his brain; at any moment she might carelessly rise and signify her wish to return to the ballroom; and he could not control her going. He took a rose from the bed of roses.

'Miss Zembra, will you give me this rose?' he said in rather a low voice.

In an instant she seemed to be startled into half-consciousness, and to recollect where she was—and what Mrs. Wygram would probably say of her. The next moment she had risen and taken the rose and placed it gently back on the table.

'We must not rob Mrs. Mellord,' she said with perfect quietude. 'And now, shall we go back?'

'I would wait ten years to get that rose from you,' he said, for this madness was still in his brain.

Perhaps she did not hear. She preceded him calmly to the door; and there, indeed, she lingered for half a second until he rejoined her; and together, as if nothing had happened, they returned to the Wygrams. But he was very pale; and all this thing around him was phantasmal—the din and splendour were alike bewildering; he looked on, but his eyes were blind.

Sabina began to question Mrs. Wygram about going, and this somewhat recalled him to himself. Nay, she spoke to him too, and with no studied coldness, but rather with a certain timidity. Had she heard, and yet was not angry? Or was it that she was too gentle to be angry?—she would rather pretend not to have heard at all?

Very soon the Wygrams and Sabina left, and for him the rose-scented ball was over. He returned no more to those brilliant rooms, with their blazing candelabra and beautiful dresses and gay music. He put on his thin summer overcoat and went away listlessly—and yet with a kind of excitement in his brain—through the dim gaslit streets—down by Gloucester Road, and Cornwall Gardens, and back by Victoria Road, and so, and stealthily, through Kensington Square. The lights were already out in the well-known house. And then he wandered away up in the Notting Hill direction until he reached his own home; and there he went into the studio, and turned up the gas,

and threw off his coat, and sat down. What had happened? And right well he knew; no further disguise or pretence was possible now; his inmost soul had spoken—to himself, if not to her.

CHAPTER XV

AN ALLIANCE

One morning Sabina and Janie were engaged on an errand in Richmond Road, Old Brompton, when a hansom cab that had come rattling along behind them was pulled up, and the occupant stepped out. Sabina happened to turn her head.

'Mr. Foster!'

And, indeed, it was Mr. Foster—brisk, smiling, complaisant; very smartly dressed and gloved, too, though the tall hat made him look a little bit unfamiliar.

'This is a stroke of luck,' said he. 'I was driving down to the sports at Lillie Bridge, little expecting to have this pleasure.'

'Oh, but you can't tell how glad I am to see you able to get about again,' she said, with great earnestness. 'Indeed, indeed, I am very glad!'

'There is not much to boast of yet,' he said lightly. 'I don't think I should like to back myself to run the Open Quarter Mile in forty-eight seconds. That was done on Saturday at this very place. But we are getting on.

And at any rate a hansom is more comfortable than a Bath-chair. I am just making the fortune of the London cabbies at present. Well, now, I won't detain you, for I saw you were walking quickly; but I want you to tell me if I may call at Kensington Square—to make your acquaintance, you know.'

'To make my acquaintance?' she repeated; she did not understand.

'Why, yes,' he continued cheerfully. 'You've only known me as a cripple—in a Bath-chair and a pot hat. I want to introduce myself in a new character. May I come to see you—and Mrs. Wygram?'

'I am sure we shall be very pleased indeed,' Sabina answered, with evident sincerity. 'Why, you don't understand—it is like getting well oneself to see you as you are now. Don't you feel very happy about it I do.'

Her sympathy was exceedingly frank, and her pleasure on witnessing this transformation obvious enough. Indeed, in her surprise and gratification over this sudden encounter, she had entirely forgotten the little tentative embassy that Mr. Foster's mother had undertaken; and when he asked her to say on which day he might call at Kensington Square, she instantly named the following afternoon.

'Sabie,' her companion remonstrated, 'you will be at the Charity Organisation!'

'I shall be home by half-past five,' was the answer, 'and

very glad of a cup of tea—because sometimes the proceedings are not quite unanimous.'

'What?' Mr. Foster struck in. 'You don't mean to say that those good people have an occasional bickering? Well I should like to be there—to lend you a helping-hand.'

Sabina laughed.

'What is the matter?' he asked innocently.

'I think you would make a strange figure at a meeting of the Charity Organisation Society,' she remarked.

'I've got an English tongue in my head—I could speak my mind,' he said bluntly. 'However, I see you want to be off. To-morrow at half-past five, then.'

And he got into the hansom again and drove away; while they turned out of this thoroughfare and made for the Fulham Road. As they were going through the Boltons, Sabina said, 'I am so glad we met him. I feel quite happy about it.'

'I don't see why his recovering from an accident should be of so much importance to you,' Janie said, rather coldly.

'You forget that I was mainly the cause of the accident,' Sabina answered, in her gentle way.

'We will not discuss that, for we are not likely to agree.' And then Janie added sharply, 'And look at the way he occupies his time, now that he can get about again—driving in hansoms to places of amusement—his only thought for himself. Why, Sabie, I can't understand the interest

you take in that man. There never were two human beings so entirely dissimilar in everything. When I think of the life he leads—sports and pleasures and pastimes from week's end to week's end, and the life that you lead—working hard, and all for other people——'

'Janie, Janie,' Sabina said, with a laugh; 'why will you be so violently prejudiced? Haven't I told you a hundred times that what is right for one person is not necessarily right for every one? Different people have different hobbies, and I happen to have mine. Do you think if I could ride like Mr. Foster, and play cricket, and so on, I should not be intensely interested in those things?'

'Oh yes,' said Janie, with cutting irony; 'I can quite imagine Sabina Zembra a champion slayer of pigeons. Two to one, bar one. That's just like you, Sabie!'

When Mr. Fred Foster called at Kensington Square the following afternoon, he was even more scrupulously neat in his attire; and the slight lameness from which he still suffered served as an excuse for the display of a walking-stick, the head of which was of elaborately carved jade. There was no embarrassment about him over this his first visit to the house; he was most pleasant to Mrs. Wygram (Janie had gone out). He was anxious to hear from Sabina of the proceedings at the Charitable Organisation Society; and he facetiously remarked that, although he had intended to introduce himself as a new acquaintance,

it was impossible to keep up the pretence—he preferred to acknowledge that he had fallen among old friends.

'Well, you know,' he said, 'the memory of a holiday-place and the time you spent there is always far finer than the thing itself; and fortunately so. Don't you ever think of those mornings at Brighton, Miss Zembra—out at the end of the pier, you know; the fresh wind and clear skies and the music; the young people about; and you beginning to think that when lunch-time comes along you will be quite ready? Very jolly mornings they were, weren't they? And when you look back at them, they seem very bright somehow—a poetical halo, I suppose? And that,' he continued, warming to his subject, for he was evidently bent on making a good impression, in his self-complacent way,—'that is what I should like to have in my composition—just enough poetry to make things look a little better than they are. It's no great harm to go on thinking all your geese are swans, so long as you don't find it out. Of course, I shouldn't want to have as much poetry as would drive one into publishing it, and running the racket of the critics, and becoming miserable if the public wouldn't look at you. Oh no; I should like to be able to take a fairly roseate view of things, but for my own use; I shouldn't care a rap what other people thought of them. As for writing real poetry, now—well, I don't know—I suppose it may be interesting to be a famous person—in your own lifetime, I mean—people stare at you, if that is any good to

you—but beyond that what is there in fame? I don't see that it would be of any advantage to me that people should remember my name two hundred years after my death.'

His *apologia pro vita suâ* would sometimes come in thus in the most unexpected fashion; but indeed it was unnecessary, for Sabina had a wide experience of diverse modes of life, and she was tolerant to a degree. If he seemed to spend a good deal of his time at Lord's and at the Oval, why should he not, on those pleasant summer afternoons? He was harming no one as far as she knew.

He did not overstay his welcome; and it was clear that on this first visit he had managed to somewhat mitigate Mrs. Wygram's prejudice against him; for it was with no great asperity that she said, when he had gone, 'Sabie, don't you think it just a little awkward that Mr. Foster should come here?'

'Why, then?' the girl said, with some surprise.

'Well, you know it is not such a long time since he asked you to be his wife—indirectly, at least. And a refusal is supposed to mean something. I should not wonder, now, if you encourage him to call, and receive him in that frank way you have with everybody, he may begin to imagine that you would not be sorry if he repeated his offer.'

Sabina reddened a little, but she said, 'Dear Mrs. Wygram, you must not put such fancies into innocent

people's heads. I am sure he is thinking of no such thing. He is as busy in his own way as I am in mine, especially now that he can get about again.'

Busy as he was, however, Mr. Foster found time to pay several visits to Kensington Square; and he was very straightforward in asking Sabina when she was likely to be found at home. He seemed exceedingly desirous of establishing affectionate relations between her and the old lady in Buckinghamshire. One day he brought with him a magnificent basket of strawberries.

'This is a little present from my mother, Miss Zembra,' he said; 'and she wants you to know that they are her own growing—of course she is rather proud of them.'

'That is very kind, I am sure,' Sabina said. 'Will you give her my best thanks, and say how good it was of her to think of me?'

'If you wouldn't mind sending her a note yourself, Miss Zembra?' he suggested. 'It would please her so much.'

'Oh yes, I will,' Sabina said at once; 'give me the address.'

And so the brief note was written and despatched to Buckinghamshire. Of course it needed no reply; but all the same the reply came, in the shape of a very long and affectionate letter, in which the old lady ventured to hope that she had done no harm by a certain indiscreet disclosure made at Brighton. Moreover, enclosed in the letter was a photograph of the garden where the strawberries

were grown, with Mrs. Foster seated in an arm-chair, and the old gentleman, scissors in hand, standing at the door of the vine-houses. It was a pretty and peaceful-looking picture, and Sabina, in acknowledging the receipt, said so. What, then, should arrive—even by return of post—but an invitation, a general invitation, to Sabina to come down to this peaceful retreat whenever she felt tired, or ill, or depressed, with abundant assurances that she would be treated with the most considerate care. A more than friendly letter, nicely worded; and Mr. Fred Foster was good enough to endorse that invitation eagerly, and to say the old lady's heart would just be filled with joy if Miss Zembra would take her at her word and go down to see her when the opportunity arose.

Another point that he went back upon again and again was the necessity of Miss Zembra introducing a little more amusement into her life. He had nothing to say against the self-appointed labours that she had devoted herself to; only that she was too assiduous. All work and no play, he insisted, was the right thing for no one, and he appealed to Mrs. Wygram. Why should not Miss Zembra have gone up to see the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's—for, indeed, he had been desirous of escorting the whole party thither?

'But I find my amusement in my work, such as it is,' Sabina said good-naturedly. 'I don't know that I should care to sit and look on at a number of boys knocking a ball

about. Perhaps I might, though. Young English lads, healthy and well-built and active, are always nice to look at. And that reminds me I am going down to see my boys on the *Arethusa* and *Chichester* next Wednesday; it is the annual inspection. Now, is not that a sufficient holiday, Mr. Foster? And I am going with a clear conscience; I shall not have to drag either Mrs. Wygram or Janie with me; Mrs. Tremenheere is going, and I have merely to pick her up at Charing Cross Pier. Now, is not that enough of a holiday? A pleasant sail down the river; luncheon on board the *Arethusa;* watching the boys go through their drill, presenting the prizes, and then back to town?'

And not only did Mr. Fred Foster express approval, but also he was curious to learn further and minute details about this projected excursion. What was the institution? Who were the managers? Who were likely to be there on Wednesday? How were invitations come at?

'You know,' said he, 'if my little arrangement about the Leicestershire Cup comes off I shall become a subscriber.'

'I think we'd rather have the money now,' Sabina said, 'and then you won't risk losing it.'

'But it's out of the profits—if any—that the subscription would come,' he then explained.

Soon, however, he was to be of assistance to her in a more immediate way. One evening about half-past six he strolled along to Kensington Square on the off-chance that

she had returned home somewhat before dinner-time: a message from the old lady in Buckinghamshire was the ostensible excuse for his calling. He had scarcely entered the Square than he perceived her at the farther corner of it coming north, so he leisurely went on to meet her.

'Oh, Mr. Foster, I am glad to see you,' she said in her frank way; 'I want to see if you can give me some help.'

'You may be sure I will if I can,' he said cheerfully.

'It's rather a sad story,' she said, plunging into the matter at once. 'A poor widow I know has an only son, a lad about fifteen, and he has got into trouble. It isn't merely the loss of his wages for the moment—though that is something to her—it is his future, and the difficulty of getting another situation for him, that is worrying the poor woman. This is how it happened. He is employed in a livery-stable-keeper's place down in Earl's Court. He had to take a whip into the clerk's office to leave it there. Well, a customer had been paying a bill, and the change was two shillings; but he had neglected to pick up the change; and he and the clerk came to the door of the office, for they were talking together. The boy goes past them into the office to leave the whip; he sees the florin lying on the counter; the temptation is too great, he slips it into his pocket. Then the man remembers he has not picked up his change; turns and finds it is gone; the boy is challenged, and at once gives up the florin. Well, of course, there is no excuse; but most people have done things they are sorry

for; and I am certain this boy has nothing of the inborn thief in him—it was a sudden temptation, and he gave way. There was a talk of prosecution; I went to his master and he consented to stop that; only he insisted on dismissing the lad; so that there he is now without a situation and without a character or reference. Can you get some kind-hearted man to overlook this one slip and give the boy another trial?'

She had an admirably business-like way of putting a case; perhaps she was used to it. As for Fred Foster, he paused; had he not always been telling her that she needed a man's shrewdness and firmness to assist her—that she was always running the risk of being imposed upon?

'If I could see the lad,' said he, 'I think I could tell by the look of him whether his story will wash.'

'Oh, but he confesses!'

'Well, I could tell whether I should care to ask somebody to give him a fresh start.'

'Would you mind coming and seeing him now?' she said promptly. 'His mother lives not ten minutes' walk from here, and he is at home just now, I know.'

'But if you are kept late for dinner?'

'Oh, that is nothing!' she said cheerfully. 'They never wait for me; that's all right.'

So they set out—she walking at a studiously moderate pace; and he seemed a little proud and pleased to have so fair a companion. And how did he entertain her? Well,

there had been a smoking concert at Mildenhall, in Suffolk, given by certain 'bookies' to their friends who were at the Newmarket race-meeting; and he had been present on this particularly festive occasion; and he gave her a fairly vivid and humorous account of the evening. He was very honest; he never sought to conceal anything about himself or his companions; and they seemed to have been pretty gay at the White Hart Hotel. In the middle of the story Sabina bowed to some one passing; and Mr. Foster, raising his hat, as in duty bound, merely glanced at the stranger.

'That is Mr. Lindsay, the artist, whom I have spoken to you about,' said Sabina.

'Oh, indeed,' he said indifferently. 'An odd-looking creature—gaunt, white-faced, and black-haired—seems to have come out of Byron's poems—those artists always do like to look singular.'

'But you must not say anything like that about Mr. Lindsay,' said Sabina gently, 'for he is a particular friend of mine—of ours.'

When they reached the widow woman's scantily-furnished lodgings, the peccant youth seemed almost paralysed with fear; he imagined that this appearance of a stranger could only mean prosecution, with its unknown horrors. But Fred Foster speedily reassured him. After a sharp scanning of the boy's face, he said, 'Look here, my lad, you've had a narrow escape, and I hope it will be a warning to you all your life. This lady has told me the whole story; and I

think I can get you a situation where you will have a fair trial—only it will be out of town——'

'Oh, he will not mind that, sir,' the mother interposed quickly, 'if only he can get another chance. Poor lad, he feels it awful, sir.'

'Well, if you mean to keep on the square,' he said, still addressing the boy, 'I'll see what I can do. Get your kit together, and meet me at Victoria Station to-morrow morning at 10.40. Will you remember?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I will take you down to Epsom, and get you a place there, where nothing will be known of what has happened. The rest is for yourself; you will have a fair chance of getting on.'

'Yes, sir, thank you, sir.' The boy was too frightened to say more.

'Well, now, that is very kind of you to take so much trouble,' Sabina said, when they were come out again; 'to go away down to Epsom——'

'Don't give me unnecessary credit, Miss Zembra,' he said at once. 'Going down to Epsom never comes amiss to me—I can always put in a day in that quarter, sometimes to my own advantage. And I will get your stable-boy a place easily enough; poor young devil, he seems frightened out of his wits. I suppose his mother has been nagging at him. What a fearful thing it would be if everything was to be treasured up against us, and no forgiveness possible. I

don't mean you,' he added hastily, 'I was talking about men. And—and—did I tell you how we wound up the evening at Mildenhall?'

Sabina thought he had not; and so—he discoursing the while on these pretty goings-on—they walked equably back to Kensington Square.

It was only a day or two after this occurrence that Walter Lindsay happened to meet Janie Wygram, who with her mother had gone to pay an afternoon call at an artist's house. Wandering about the big studio, as all of them did, he had little difficulty in getting the chance of saying a few words to Janie by herself.

'I suppose,' he said rather diffidently, 'that it was the Mr. Foster you told me of whom I saw walking with Miss Zembra the other day?'

Janie instantly turned her sympathetic and troubled eyes towards him and then lowered them.

'I did not know you had seen them,' she said; 'but no doubt it was Mr. Foster. Sabie told me he had gone with her to see some people she's interested in. Well, what do you think of him?'

She hoped he would say something bitter and savage.

'I only caught a moment's glimpse of him,' he answered evasively. 'He goes a good deal to Kensington Square?'

He endeavoured to speak in an indifferent way; but Janie was not deceived.

'Yes, he has been there several times of late;' and

there was a little touch of indignation in her tone as she added, 'and do you know how he has acquired such an influence over Sabie? Well, I'll tell you—it's his impudence—pure impudence. Sabie has never been treated in that free and easy way before; and she doesn't understand it, and gets bewildered; and thinks there must be something in him because he is cool and complacent and masterful towards her. And to think that Sabie—a girl like Sabie—should be imposed upon by pure impudence!'

But Janie Wygram could scarcely be regarded as a dispassionate judge.

CHAPTER XVI

A BETROTHAL

Among decorous people it is considered that an unmarried young lady should not drive alone in a hansom; but Sabina was a very busy woman; and besides she considered herself elderly; so it was in a hansom that on this brilliant July morning she drove along to Charing Cross Pier. Almost at the same moment Mrs. Tremenheere arrived in her carriage; and the two ladies went down to the special steamer that was awaiting the party. As they stepped on board, the first person to come forward and greet Sabina was Mr. Fred Foster.

Now Mr. Foster, though his sympathies in certain directions were distinctly limited, had a good deal of natural sagacity; and instantly he saw—from the look of surprise, or more than surprise—in Sabina's face—that in planning this artful little stratagem he had made a mistake. And as quickly as he could he made his apology.

'I did not know until last night,' he said, 'that I had secured an invitation; for I have been down in Buckinghamshire—my first trip there since—since the little acci-

dent. And you have told me so much about these training-ships, Miss Zembra—I thought it would be a good opportunity—I was very glad when I found I was to have the chance of seeing them.'

Sabina somewhat formally introduced him to Mrs. Tremenheere; and he was very humble and civil in getting them seats where the awning would shelter them from the sun; and there was no suggestion in his manner that he had come hither with any dark design. Moreover, Sabina was not one quick to take offence; perhaps it was really his interest in the *Arethusa* and the *Chichester* that had prompted his coming; and if so, did not he deserve a little encouragement and friendliness? He did not in any way whatever seek to thrust his society on the two ladies; but he was within call. And as Mrs. Tremenheere was devoting her whole and rapt attention to the Bishop of Sudbury—who was discoursing to her of the iniquity of spending money on orchids—Fred Foster came gradually to be Sabina's attendant and companion, when no one else claimed her.

It was a very pleasant sail down the river; flags flying; a juvenile brass band playing from time to time in the forward part of the steamer; the lads on the training-ships that they passed giving them a hearty cheer as they went by.

'If helping in a good work were always as enjoyable as this, there would be lots of it. I feel very virtuous indeed,' he remarked cheerfully.

'I feel very serious,' was her rejoinder, 'for they have fixed on me to give away the prizes; and though I get on very well among the boys when they are by themselves, I don't like having a lot of spectators looking on.'

'I wish I could be of any assistance to you,' he said (and Mrs. Tremenheere was entirely given over to her dear bishop; he could address himself directly, if modestly and respectfully, to Sabina's eyes). 'I feel myself such a useless creature in the world whenever I meet you. Ah, I wish you heard my mother speak of you, Miss Zembra. It was Miss Zembra this and Miss Zembra that, all the time I was down. I think she would consent to be ill if she thought you would come and tend her a little. She was talking about a poor woman—an imaginary woman—lying sick and hopeless and friendless; and she said that to such a poor creature, when you went into the room, your face must appear to be the face of an angel. And she hasn't forgotten your promise to go and see her——'

Sabina looked up in surprise.

'Perhaps there wasn't quite a promise,' he said quickly; 'but I fancy that in her case the wish was father to the thought. Oh yes; and she has settled upon the room that you are to have when you go down—it is a curious little box, all by itself; but it overlooks the garden, and it is very quiet, and she says you will be so much the better for absolute rest and quiet after your hard work in London.

'I am sure she is very kind,' Sabina was bound to say.

'I hadn't quite such a good time with the Pater,' her companion continued with a rueful smile. 'No, he was rather rough on me. He did not think much of my invention as likely to increase the sum of human happiness.'

A glance of inquiry asked him to explain.

'Oh, didn't I tell you? Did you not hear of my invention?' he said. 'Well, it was in this way. You see, after you left Brighton, it was pretty slow down there for me, and I had to do a good deal of steady thinking all by myself. And then it was that an idea occurred to me which will enable me to go down to the latest ages as a benefactor of mankind. You know how awkward it is for a lady, when she is riding alone in the country, to mount her horse by herself—supposing she has to get down to tighten the girths—and there is no stile or gate handy. Well, now, my invention is a small ladder of rope that can easily be folded up and fastened to the saddle, and there she is independent! She has neither to trust herself to the clumsiness of some country lout nor walk along to the nearest cottage for the loan of a chair; she can get down or up for herself as she pleases. And would you believe it—the Pater saw nothing in that idea to add to the gaiety of nations; and when I talked to him about Galileo, and Sir Walter Raleigh, and George Stephenson, he used the most reprehensible language. Great discoveries are always treated like that. It isn't until after we are dead that the public find out how much they owe to us.'

'I am afraid you try the old gentleman's patience a little,' she said, venturing to look up at him.

'But what am I to do?' he said. 'Begin and work some of those farms? I could not make as much out of them as the present tenants, and they're all skating on the edge of bankruptcy. He thinks I ought to do something; and I want to know what I am to do.'

'Are there no beggars at your gate?' Sabina said gently.

'There are,' he answered with cheerful promptitude; 'and what's more, there will be beggars all over the place if farming doesn't become more profitable. But don't say anything against me this time, Miss Zembra. Surely I'm engaged in a good and charitable work at the present moment? I'm actually going down to have luncheon on board the *Arethusa*.'

And this sardonic self-depreciation of his pleased Sabina a good deal more than any affected interest or other hypocrisy; he seemed to be constantly saying to her, 'Well, I'm not much of a fellow; but you are very good-natured, you won't be too hard.'

A right brave sight was that that met their eyes when they reached their destination; for the yards of the great vessel were manned by near a thousand lads and boys; and loud and long was the cheering that greeted the visitors. And then, when they had got on board and began to look round the ship, it was but natural that Mr. Foster should remain with the small party whom he had accompanied

on the way down; and, therefore, when the crowd went below for lunch, he assumed the right of attending upon the two ladies, and very assiduously and cheerfully did he execute the task. Mrs. Tremenheere was rather pleased with the young man. And she was interested in him; for she had heard of the accident, and of Sabina's care of him subsequently. She thought he was rather good-looking, and distinctly well-dressed; and if he carried his frankness of manner to the verge of a certain cool audacity, she reflected that Sabina and he had been thrown so much into each other's society that now he probably regarded her in the light of an old friend.

After lunch the visitors went on deck again, and the business of the day began. Very proud indeed was Sabina over the smart and seaman-like way in which the lads went through their drill; and she spied out here and there amongst them a particular favourite of her own; and what officer could check the return glances of recognition? Of course she wore the silver anchor at her neck. And she was as pleased at the proficiency of these young sailors as if she had trained them all herself; and she was glad that the people clapped their hands when something particularly prompt was done; and she made bold to ask Mr. Foster if the country should not be grateful to an institution that took the neglected boys of London and turned them into fine, smart, healthy-looking, bright-eyed fellows, of whom England might one day be in urgent need. Then came

her own share in the programme—the distribution of the prizes and medals; and as each blushing recipient came forward—the best swimmer, the most popular boy, the smartest lad aloft, and so forth—Sabina managed to say a kindly word or two to him as she put the prize into his hand or pinned the medal on his breast. And of course Mr. Foster was at her side all this time; and perhaps his little underhand jokes rather tended to give her confidence; anyhow her fingers did not tremble much as she pinned on the medals; and her eyes—that could express approval very well indeed—said as much as her words.

'Bravo, Johnny; you've done it again,' she said to one of the prize-winners; and she turned to Fred Foster, 'That is one of my own boys.'

Indeed, Sabina was so highly pleased with the success of the whole of the day's performance that, when they had seen the last of the boat-racing, and were returning to town again on board the steamer, she was in a far more animated mood than Mr. Foster had ever seen before; and she was particularly gracious to himself. He had been her companion, in a way; he had stood by her, through that public ceremony; and now that it was all over, it was comfortable to sit here in idleness, and listen to his half-facetious comments about men and things. And what should hinder him from taking up that same subject he had been harping on so much of late, and giving it a more immediate and personal application? An early opportunity arrived. Mrs.

Tremenheere went below to have some tea, her bishop accompanying her. Sabina did not care for any; she preferred to remain on deck. And then it was that Fred Foster renewed his prayer that Sabina should not give herself so wholly up to these charitable labours of hers—that she should introduce a little amusement into her life.

It was a roundabout way of placing an offer of marriage before a young lady; but it was not an unskilful one. There was no startling suddenness about it. Sabina found herself listening to an argument that seemed to be pervaded by sound common sense. All work and no play, he said, was just as bad as all play and no work; the first was her case, the second his; wouldn't it be a better and wholesomer arrangement if he could share her work, and she take some part in his amusements? It was quite gradually that she came to understand what he meant—that they should join their two lives so as to arrive at this fair compromise between pleasure and duty; and she listened with her eyes cast down, and with many rapid fancies running through her head. There was not much sentiment expressed in this proposal; but then she did not consider herself a sentimental person. Was there not, on the other hand, instead of sentiment, a certain reasonableness and fitness? More than once she had found herself in need of a man's support and guidance; while (for there was no austerity in her nature) a little holiday-making now and again might gladden life up somewhat. She listened in silence, perhaps afraid

to understand his meaning too clearly; but presently his speech became plain enough.

'You know my mother went to see you at Brighton, Miss Zembra,' he said, and his eyes were fixed on the deck, and he spoke in an undertone, for there were many people about. 'That was foolish on my part. An ambassador is no good. And even here—when I have the chance—I can only say bits of things. But I have been thinking it over a good deal, and a partnership between us seems reasonable; and of course that partnership could only mean marriage. I ought to tell you what I think of you; but I can't praise you to your face; besides, Mrs. Tremenheere may be up again any minute. But I think we might have "a real good time," as the Yankees say; and I should be tremendously interested in all you are doing, and lend you a hand when there was a chance; and then, when you are overfagged and deserve a day's holiday-making, you might leave me to engineer that with a fair amount of confidence. I would live anywhere you liked; I haven't many friends in London; and you don't seem to go out much; when we went pleasuring it would be in the country. There's Goodwood, now; wouldn't it be fine to get you away from those slums, and run down to Brighton for a week, and get hold of a dogcart and a stout little cob? There's the Mater too—wouldn't she welcome you? And if you want quiet, that's the place; and shouldn't I be willing to play good boy then? Sabina—is it to be "Yes?"'

She looked up for a second, timid and hesitating.

'No,' he said quickly, 'if you are afraid to say "Yes" on so short a notice, say nothing. Think over it. Will you?'

She nodded slightly, with her eyes still cast down. And then he said eagerly, 'But this you must promise—to take no one into your confidence. Will you promise to make your decision yourself? Oh, I know what will happen if you take advice. Your people at Lancaster Gate hate the sight of me. I don't wonder at it, and I don't resent it. Perhaps I shouldn't myself like having anybody planked in my house like that. If you ask them, they will say no; I am certain of it; and I don't see that they take such care of you that you should be particular about asking their permission or advice. And as for the Wygrams, they would say the same thing; for they are very fond of you, and they are jealous, and would be angry at any one taking you away from them. But never mind that. When it was all over I should soon be able to pacify them. Now will you promise me so much—that you will form your judgment entirely by yourself?'

She was understood to assent; he could hardly hear her speak.

'And that you will make it "Yes" if you can?' he pleaded. 'Sabina, that is not too much to ask?'

Whether it was or not was of little consequence, for at

this moment Mrs. Tremenheere made her appearance on deck; and the bishop, coming along, would insist on carrying Sabina away to have some tea or something of that kind.

Nor did Mr. Foster have another opportunity of speaking privately with her during the rest of the way up the river; but as they were going ashore at Charing Cross—where Sabina was to embark in Mrs. Tremenheere's barouche, and be driven home that way—he managed to say to her, 'Will you send me a message to-morrow?'

And as they shook hands at the door of the carriage, she said to him—but with averted eyes—'Yes; to-morrow.'

It was not a long time in which to form a decision which would affect the whole of her life; and yet it cannot be said that she spent an agonising night of doubt and dread. For one thing, she was no timid young creature of seventeen, driven out of her wits by the discovery that Charlie has stolen unawares into her heart, confronted by the awfulness of having to break her promise to poor Tommy, and conscious at the same time of certain secret and pronounced flirtations with Frank, that had no doubt awakened certain hopes in his mind, and that it would be remarkably difficult to explain away. Nor was there any wild passion in the matter; Sabina was twenty-five; she had seen too much of the real trouble of the world to care about indulging in romantic imaginary woes; life had been serious with her. Perhaps, indeed, a trifle too serious? For it

was a cheerful prospect, on the whole, that Fred Foster had opened out before her. She was to have his advice and aid in time of difficulty; she was to have his blithe companionship when they thought fit to snatch a holiday. There was a kind of happy-go-lucky self-reliance about him which was in itself assuring; he seemed very certain that the projected partnership would work well; she did not think it would be so much amiss if on occasion they left overcrowded lanes and alleys for a pleasant drive to Goodwood.

Nor had she any fear about forming a decision for herself; for she had for long been accustomed to manage her own affairs. And well she knew that he had spoken truth in warning her as to the consequences of her seeking counsel either from her own people or from the Wygrams. Neither the one nor the other knew Fred Foster as she did; they were governed by a violent prejudice against him; it would not be honest advice she would get, but an expression of ill-will. And was it not a pity to see this young fellow, who had many good qualities about him, left to drift uselessly about the world? His income she knew was not very large; indeed, he was almost entirely dependent upon his mother; still it might be better employed than in backing horses. Her income and his together would enable them to live very comfortably in a moderate way, and also permit her to continue her works of charity as well as to have a little amusement now and again, according to his projected plan.

His mother would be kind to her, she knew. Altogether, regarding the matter from every possible point of view, it not only looked reasonable and practicable, but also attractive in many ways; as for Fred Foster himself, surely it was affection that had prompted his offer (for she had no fortune); then she liked his frankness, and his sardonic self-criticism, and also the quiet audacity with which he sought to get the best of everything within his reach; and she made no doubt that a man like this, who was rather given to belittling himself, would in the end turn out more trustworthy than a man who was eager to show himself off to the best advantage.

And yet it is no light matter for a young woman to sign away the days of her freedom and maidenhood; and next morning the letter that was to deliver Sabina into slavery—into partnership, he called it—was written many times over before she could consider it even passable. And when she came downstairs to breakfast, she was somewhat self-conscious, and rather avoided Janie's eye.

'Are you tired, Sabie, dear, after your trip to Greenhithe?' said Mrs. Wygram, noticing that she was rather silent.

'No, no, not at all;' the girl said, and some slight colour came unwittingly into the pale, calm, beautiful face. 'Why, it was a holiday—I think we all enjoyed it very much.'

By and by Sabina had to set forth on the business of the day; and this time she was going alone. But before

leaving the house, she sought out Janie, and took her into the drawing-room, where there was no one but themselves. She had her hand on Janie's arm.

'Janie, dear, I have a secret to tell you.'

Her eyes were smiling; her cheeks rose-tinted; she was hesitating and timid—and then she suddenly made a step forward and kissed Janie, and put her head close to her head.

'Janie, be kind to me—don't be vexed—I—I am engaged to be married.'

Janie withdrew herself from that embrace, her surprise was so great.

'You, Sabie?' she managed to say. 'But—but—to whom?'

'To Mr. Foster,' was the answer given in a kind of doubtful tone.

'Oh, Sabie, what have you done!' the girl cried, and there was anguish in the cry, and her face had grown suddenly pale. 'Oh, what have you done, Sabie—when—when there was one man in all the world who really loved you——'

Janie had stepped back, white-faced and frightened.

'Yes, and you knew it—you knew it—and now you have broken his heart!'

'You must not talk such nonsense,' said Sabina, somewhat proudly. 'And we will not mention the subject again until you have come back to your senses.'

And therewith she turned and went from the room, leaving poor Janie entirely overcome; for not only was she aware that an awful calamity had occurred—and to her beloved Sabie—but also she had quarrelled with her nearest and dearest friend.

CHAPTER XVII

PREPARATIONS

In these days of strict governance one would hardly expect to find in Kensington High Street a well-conducted young lady vainly endeavouring to repress her sobs, and occasionally and furtively wiping a tear-drop away from her wet eyelashes. Yet such was Janie Wygram's condition on this July morning; and she had not quite recovered her self-control even when she had got up to Notting Hill. But she had grown reckless in this sudden grief that had come upon her; and she longed for consolation—which is sometimes to be found in the imparting of news to a faithful friend; and it was with no hesitation at all that she rang the bell of Walter Lindsay's house, and asked if he was at home.

He was at home. He was in the studio, she was informed. Was he alone? Only a model with him. But Janie had lived much among painters; she knew that models form the telephonic system of the art world; and this communication she had to make to Walter Lindsay was not meant for alien ears. So she sent a message to him, and awaited him in the drawing-room.

Presently she heard a step, and her heart sank within her. She knew not how to meet him. And even as he came forward to greet her—a little surprised he was, but certainly pleased by this unexpected visit—she could not help thinking, with a heavy heart, that it was this man, so distinguished-looking, so generous of nature, so courteous and gentle in all ways, that Sabina had thrown over—for whom? She stole another glance at him, and essayed to speak, but in vain. Then he noticed that she had been crying, and instantly he took her hand again, and his face was full of a quick concern.

'What is it? What has happened?' he said.

'I—I came to tell you,' said Janie, striving not to give way. 'Sabie—Sabie is engaged to be married.'

Quite involuntarily he dropped her hand. She did not dare to look at his face. Indeed, her eyes were all wet and blind; she had enough to do with her own trouble.

As for him—— They say that a drowning man sees all the backward years at a glance. He seemed to see all his future years—stretching on and on—gray, barren, hopeless, solitary. That was but for a moment.

'I suppose—it is—to that Mr. Foster?' he said, in a voice that was apparently quite calm.

'Oh yes,' said Janie, in a half-hysterical fashion. 'And I have been afraid of it all along! They were together always at Brighton—I heard it from mother—and Sabie is so strange—she lets herself be talked over—especially if

you ask anything from her—and I suppose that—that contemptible horse-jockey has appealed to her sympathy, and she has taken pity on him.'

'Janie,' Walter Lindsay said gravely, 'don't you think it would be wiser if you tried to make the best of what has happened?'

'But it was you I wanted her to marry, if ever she married any one,' Janie broke out afresh. 'We all wanted it. If Sabie had only done that——'

'But what is the use of speaking of it?' he gently remonstrated—and she was so much occupied with her own sorrow that she did not notice how gray his face had become all this while, how haunted and absent his eyes. 'You know that was never possible.'

'No, I suppose it was not,' she said, in a kind of despair. 'I suppose it was never possible. You were too well off; too happy; and—and—and every one making much of you. She used always to talk of you as being so fortunate, having such a great career before you. It was always work she thought of; she never let sentiment, affection, come in—unless it was about poor people. Yes,' added Janie bitterly, 'you were always too well off for Sabie. But if you had been a miserable, insignificant, conceited, contemptible creature, like this horse-jockey——'

'Janie,' he said, with a touch of authority, 'you are acting very foolishly. You are letting your disappointment

become a craze; and it will be all the more difficult for you to remain on good terms with Mr. Foster if you nurse this silly anger against him.'

'On good terms with him?' she said scornfully.

'For Sabina's—for Miss Zembra's sake.'

'But Sabie has gone away from me now!' Janie cried. 'Sabie, who was my friend——'

'She is your friend,' he said quietly. 'Now, sit down and tell me how all this came about, and how you heard of it.'

Janie sat down obediently; but how was she to tell him of the arguments and persuasions that Fred Foster had used in winning over Sabina? Janie knew nothing of all these; but she had formed her own theories and guesses, and it was these that she now placed before him, Walter Lindsay in vain endeavouring to mitigate the malice of her insinuations. And as for Foster's motives in seeking to make Sabina his wife, she could make them out also. Sabina was a very pretty woman; and, for a year or two, until he got tired of her, she would do him credit when he drove her to a racecourse. Then there was her £300 a year. Sabina, Janie explained, was very frank in discussing her financial position when charitable projects were being considered; of course Mr. Foster must have learned what her allowance from her father was. And would not the £300 be a handy addition to his income, and enable him to bet a little more on horses and grey-

hounds? Besides that (Janie contended) he was of course expecting a rich man like Sir Anthony Zembra to give his daughter a handsome marriage-portion. Where would that go? In gambling, of course. And then? Poor Sabie!

'No, no, no!' he said, 'I will not hear anything of the kind. These are only Cassandra prophecies. Depend upon it, a woman like Miss Zembra could not make such a mistake in her choice; there must be something finer and better than that in him; remember she knows so much more about him than you do. And you are going to be reconciled to him—that is what you have got to do; and both you and I, whatever happens, will remain Miss Zembra's fast friends; and I, for one, I—I wish her a very happy marriage!'

She raised her eyes to his face. There was not much gaiety there, but a serious wistfulness, rather; and his look, which was directed to the window, was thoughtful and absent. And for the life of her—regarding him thus—she could not help repeating what she had said before as to what she had sketched out as Sabina's future.

'No, I think none of us were anxious that Sabie should marry; she was so good and perfect and beautiful that we all wished to have a share in her and to have a little of her kindness and attention; but if she was to marry, it should have been you; indeed, indeed, that would have reconciled us all to it.'

'But it is of no use talking of that now,' said he, gently putting away the subject. 'No, dear Miss Janie, what you have to do now is to think of what is best for her. As for me, I don't pity myself overmuch. Surely no harm can come to any one through having known a good woman. Anything more than her friendship was never possible; but I had that for a time, and I will remember it all my life, I hope. Now, give me your promise.'

'What?'

'That you will do everything you can for Miss Zembra; and, as the first thing, that you will receive her future husband as she would like to have him received.'

'No, I can't promise that,' she said stubbornly.

'And what is the value, then, of your affection for your Sabie, as you call her?'

'You ask too much—you ask too much!' she exclaimed; and the tears were like to come into her eyes again; but she rose, as if to go away. And then she said reluctantly, 'Well, I—I know what you say is right. It isn't everybody who is so unselfish as you. Perhaps, some time later on, I will try; and I hope that what you say will come true, and that there is a chance of Sabie's being happy. But I should have been happier if she had made another choice.'

'Remember,' he said to her at the door; and as she turned to him for a moment, she thought there was something in the grave, sad face she had never seen there before

an inexpressible gentleness and tenderness, as it were—'remember,' he said, as his last word to her, 'that you are Miss Zembra's friend, and may be of great help to her. There are some who would be proud to be in that position.'

Well, if Sabina, at this crisis of her life, was to have the goodwill and aid and sympathy of her friends, it was more than she was likely to receive from her relatives. Of course, she said to Fred Foster, she must go and tell her father of her engagement.

'As for that,' remarked Mr. Foster, in his cheerful manner, 'if there's going to be any kind of a row, you'd better let me do it. Oh, I don't mind. I have an impression that your father isn't very fond of me; and if he wants to say so, or to say anything nasty about our engagement, I am willing to stand the racket. Bless you, it's wonderful how little words can hurt you, if you look at them the right way. They're only air — air can't hurt you. I've seen a woman's lips turn white because of a little remark addressed to her. It would need some particularly penetrating patent gastight remarks to make my lips turn white. Oh, I shouldn't mind in the least.'

'I hope there won't be any trouble,' Sabina said. 'They've always left me to act for myself. But if there should be any objection—or—or misapprehension—I am sure that I shall be able to talk more gently than you would.'

'Oh, I don't believe in gentle speaking,' said he cheerfully. 'Plain speaking is ever so much better. Besides, there may be a few little business arrangements to talk over; you'd better let me go.'

Sabina laughed.

'Are we to have a quarrel already?' she asked. 'It is true I have been living separate from my family for some time; and they let me go my own way; but don't you think it would look a little bit queer if I were to send a third person to tell my father that his daughter was going to be married?'

'Do as you like then, Sabie,' said he in his offhand way. 'But I think I should have made a better job of it.'

That same afternoon Sabina went along to the Waldegrave Club. It was with her father alone, she considered, not with the other members of the family, that she had to deal; and she knew when she would most likely find him at his club—a little before question-time at the House. The hall-porter at the Waldegrave recognised her at once, for she had often called there. He asked her to step within and take a seat, while he sent a page-boy for Sir Anthony; and so it was that Sabina found herself awaiting her father in this great hall, that looked so quiet and clean and cool after the din and dust of the hot London streets.

Sir Anthony came along in his most majestic manner, serene, complacent, looking all round the hall for some one to favour with a distant nod. When he reached Sabina,

he plumped himself down beside her on the softly-cushioned seat.

'Well, Smallpox,' he said (for he was a desperately witty person on occasion), 'what do you want now?'

'Do you remember Mr. Foster, papa?'

'Foster,' he said, with a sudden coldness. 'Do you mean the young man who was good enough to confer his society on us for a considerable period—a very considerable period?'

'But it was through no fault or wish of his own, papa,' she pleaded. 'Why do you speak of him like that? It is such a pity you should have formed a prejudice against him.'

'We're rid of him now, anyway; and I wish to hear no more about him,' he said shortly.

'But it is about him I came to see you,' she said.

'Oh. He is in the hospital still, I suppose; and you want to raise a subscription for him when he comes out. Is that it? Well, you needn't come to me—I will not give you a shilling—no, nor a penny.'

'Papa, he is a gentleman!' she said rather incoherently. 'And please don't talk of him like that. I—I am engaged to be married to him.'

He stared at her in dumb surprise. Was the girl mad? And then, when he had become convinced of the truth of the few words she had just spoken, he broke into no violent explosion (how could he, in the hall of the Walde-

grave Club?), rather he affected to treat the news with much respect.

'Really, Sabina, I am very much obliged to you,' he said (though the look in his eyes was scarcely in consonance with the extreme suavity of his voice). 'Your consideration for us all is most kind. You can't imagine what a relief will be felt at home. For, of course, knowing your ways, we had been expecting you to choose at the highest a costermonger for your husband; and we had been looking forward to a visit from you all—the charwoman, his mother; his brother, the prize-fighter; and his sister—well, anything; and we should have had altogether a nice family party. But this is a much better arrangement—quite a bound up the social ladder—let's see, what is his profession?'

'Papa, you are not very kind to me,' she said, with a slight quiver of the lips.

But at this moment Sir Anthony Zembra's face became all beams and smiles. A very distinguished and famous statesman had just come out of the reading-room, and as he passed he nodded and said, 'How are you, Sir Anthony?'

And Sir Anthony, with the most winning expression, made haste to answer, 'How do you do! How do you do!' for who knows when one may wish to have the favour of a dispenser of office?

However, at the same moment, the remarkably keen eyes of the great man had caught sight of Sabina, and he stopped;

for he was known to be very partial to pretty young ladies, whom he treated with an old-world courtesy that was very pleasant to look upon.

'Miss Zembra, I think?'

Sabina rose, as in duty bound.

'We don't meet very often,' said the old gentleman, and he bowed over the hand that Sabina timidly extended to him, 'but I hear of you from time to time through Mrs. Tremenheere. Yes, I hear of your goodness. But mind you take care of yourself, my dear; we can't afford to lose any such as you.'

He patted her hand and said, 'Good-bye,' and went on his way. Sabina sat down again. Sir Anthony's face instantly resumed its former expression of perfectly implacable coldness and firmness.

'Well, now that you have given me the information, what more?' he said.

'Have you nothing to say to me, papa?' she answered, with an appealing look.

'Oh, I wish you joy, if that is what you mean,' he said calmly. 'I wish you joy—without any sarcasm. Marrying a man you don't know——'

'But I do know him—everything about him,' she said. 'And I know his people—and his mother has promised to be very kind to me.'

'More than my own relatives seem likely to be!' she might have added; but she did not want to make mischief.

'Oh, his mother has promised to be very kind to you. Has she offered to support you?'

'I hardly know what you mean,' she said, rather bewildered.

'Only that I don't see that I am called upon to support another man's wife,' he continued. 'You take this step without the slightest consultation with your family. You did not consult them probably because you knew it would be against their wishes. Very well. It's a free country. You may go your own way; but as you make your bed you must lie on it. You don't suppose that I am going to support you and this man who has no claim upon me whatever, unless unbounded impudence be a claim.'

'My husband will be able to support me,' said Sabina proudly, but imprudently, for his eyes darkened a little.

'Very well,' he said, in the same impassive way. 'We'll see how it turns out. But mind, I never do anything out of anger. I will make you a certain allowance, so that you shall not have to fear starvation. I think that is my duty. What the amount will be I will consider later on.'

'Papa, I did not come here to ask you for money!'

'No? Then I suppose you came merely to impart the agreeable news. Well, having done so, is there anything more to be said? I must be off to the House.'

She knew not what to say. She had expected that he

would be annoyed, and that she might have some trouble in talking him over. She had not expected to be confronted with this stony and stolid indifference.

'Won't you come to the wedding?' she said, in desperation.

He lifted his eyebrows in affected surprise.

'Come to the wedding? No, I think not. What could put that into your head? Of course you are quite aware that if you are really bent on this folly—if you are determined to throw yourself away on this man—then I must decline to have either him or you come near my house. I don't wish to make any fuss. You are a grown woman; you are able to judge for yourself. I only wish to let you know clearly what will be the consequences of this freak of yours.'

She rose; her lips were proud and firm.

'Yes, I understand,' she said; and she bade good-bye to him without offering her hand; and turned and went away; and got into the cab that was awaiting her; and drove home.

And how eagerly and impatiently she waited for Fred Foster, who was to come to see her that evening!

'Oh, Fred,' she said piteously (Janie had retired from the drawing-room), 'it was dreadful!'

'I knew it would be,' he said laughing. 'All the fat in the fire, no doubt. You'd much better have let me manage the business.'

'I suppose a girl should never say anything against her father,' poor Sabie continued (rather clinging to him a little, as if for sympathy); 'but he was like stone—if it had been mere anger, I shouldn't have minded so much.'

'It will blow over,' he said carelessly. 'They're often like that, those inconvenient papas. But they always come round in the end, especially if there's——'

'If there's a baby,' he was on the point of saying, but luckily stopped in time.

'And about the money—he seemed to think I had come to ask him for money!' she continued.

'Yes, I told you you'd better have left me to manage it,' he answered coolly. 'But it's all right, Sabie; it will be all right in the end, never you fear.'

'But will you do this for me?' she said, at once timidly and eagerly. 'You know, my father said he would make me an allowance—but you can't tell how it was offered: well, now, if I could only say to him, "No, thank you, my husband can support me," don't you see how proud I should be? I don't want to do it out of anger or revenge—but to justify you, and to show him that the cruel things he said were quite uncalled for. Do you think we could afford to refuse that allowance? I know it would make a great difference to me—I mean it would be so much more difficult to look after any of those poor people; but we might pinch a little—I could, in lots of things; I would try hard.'

'My dear child,' he said good-naturedly, 'you're suffering from a fit of heroics. Your sensitive soul has been wounded. No doubt you and I could live on my income, with prudence and a frugal and contented mind; but most assuredly you would have no margin for your tribe of dependents. No, no, Sabie, don't be angry with your poor father; he'll come round. He did not mean the half of what he said —they never do; but it sounds well, and gives them importance for the moment.'

'It was for your sake,' she said, hesitatingly.

'But, you see, I haven't a sensitive soul. We couldn't afford to run two in the same establishment. I care as little what the good papa thinks of me as he does of what I think of him. No, no; the wise thing to do is to take what we can get, and to hope for more; and I daresay we shall do very well, somehow or other. And don't be too down-hearted about the Herr Papa—I tell you it's wonderful how much more people say than they mean.'

There was a tapping at the door; a maid-servant announced to them that the rest of the household were awaiting them at supper; and Sabina's proud project of renunciation was at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WEDDING

It was a summer night at Brighton. The tall house-fronts were gray and wan against the crimson and yellow still lingering in the north-western heavens; but far away over the sea, to the south-east, there dwelt a golden moon in a sky of pale rose-purple; and the moonlight that fell on the wide waters was soft and shimmering, until it gleamed sharp and vivid where the ripples broke on the beach. Here and there the stars of the gaslamps began to tell in the twilight. There was a faint murmur of talking; young girls in white summer costumes went by, with laughter and jest; there was an open window, and somebody within a brilliantly-lit drawing-room was singing—in a voice not very loud, but still audible to such of the passers-by as happened to pause and listen—an old Silesian air. It was about a lover, and a broken ring, and the sound of a mill-wheel.

Walter Lindsay was among these casual listeners—for a minute or two; and then he went on, with some curious fancies in his head. Not that any young maiden had deceived him, or that he was particularly anxious to find

rest in the grave; for this is the latter half of the nineteenth century, and he, as well as others, knew that Wertherism was now considered ridiculous. But somehow London had become intolerable to him; and he could not work; and—well, Brighton was the nearest place to get away to, while one was considering further plans. It was a little lonely, it is true; especially on these summer evenings, when all the world seemed, as it were, to be murmuring in happiness. Over there was the Chain Pier. A few golden points—gas-lamps—glimmered on it; and beyond it there was a small boat, the sail of which caught the last dusky-red light from the sunset, and looked ghostly on the darkening plain. In that direction peace seemed to lie. He began to think that if he passed away from this laughing and murmuring crowd, and went out to the end of the pier, and quietly slipped down into the placid waters, the world would be none the worse for the want of him, and a good deal of heart-sickness would come to an end. He did not really contemplate suicide; it was a mere fancy. Killing oneself for love is not known nowadays, except among clerks and shop-lads; and then it is generally prefaced by cutting a young woman's throat, which is unpleasant. No, it was a mere fancy that haunted him, and not in a too mournful fashion. He thought of the people who would decide that it was at such and such a moment that he must have flung himself into the sea, from the fact of his watch having stopped then; and he knew that they would be in error because, of course, the

water does not instantly get into the inside of a watch. He even remembered the story of the impecunious reporter who wrote, 'Sevenpence-halfpenny having been found in the pockets of the deceased, no motive could be assigned for the rash act;' and he wondered whether, he having several sovereigns in his pocket, it would be assumed that this was not suicide at all. But these were but idle dreams and reveries; because he knew that this dull, continuous, insatiable heartache in time would cease—or, at least, he hoped so; and, besides that, he thought he would like in the coming years to be kind to Sabina's children.

There were so many young women coming along this Marine Parade; some sedately walking with their mammas; some giggling with their companions; some aimlessly alone and silent: why was it that none of them had any interest for him at all, and that his heart was far away in London? In the distance, sometimes, he saw a tall figure; and a sharp spasm of wonder would seize him: might not this be some one like Sabina—with something of the inexpressible magic and charm of Sabina's presence, with something of Sabina's look in her eyes, with the proud set of her head and her fearless gait? Then the young lady would draw near—perhaps graceful and good-looking and gentle-looking enough, and no doubt a most charming and accomplished and praiseworthy young person; but the first swift glance that told him it was not Sabina herself was sufficient; she went by unheeded. Of course all this was the sheer per-

versity of foolish sentiment; and he knew it; and he walked back to the Bedford Hotel declaring to himself that love was the most idiotic thing in the world (and rightly laughed at by all sensible people), and that what he was really concerned about was the size of the canvas on which he was to attempt a picture of the Shannon rapids at Killaloe.

On reaching the hotel he found awaiting him there a letter from his faithful friend and correspondent, Janie Wygram, who had promised to let him know how things were going on.

'DEAR MR. LINDSAY,' she wrote, 'I have tried to do as you said; and it has not been quite so hard as I expected; for I do think he is really fond of Sabie—in a careless way; and that he is good-natured when everything is done to please him. But sometimes—well, you will say I am prejudiced, but I must tell the truth—sometimes he vexes me terribly. Why, he seems to think it is all a piece of fun, a frolic! Fancy any one marrying our Sabie as if it was part of a Bank Holiday excursion! He doesn't in the least understand what a prize he has won, or the favour she has shown him; it's all a free-and-easy give-and-take with him; indeed, I am not sure that he doesn't consider that she is the one who ought to be smiling and grateful. I know he has a pretty good opinion of himself, anyway; and you understand how generous Sabie is; she always makes the

most of everybody; and of course, after what you said, I'm not going to make her discontented or pick out defects. But fancy having to write like this about Sabie's lover! I don't think I ever did really want her to marry anybody; but many a time, in reading poetry, I have thought that if ever Sabie had a sweetheart, it would be a beautiful sight to see, and just like the wonderful pictures of the poets. Many a time I have thought of her as Rosalind, putting the chain round Orlando's neck, and wishing him well in the wrestling; for giving is Sabie's natural attitude, I think. But it is no use talking; and I won't say how very, very different from these romantic pictures is the present situation; for you are quite right about making the best of it for her sake; and you may be sure of this, that however *any one else* may choose to behave, or make light of his great good fortune, which he *doesn't understand a bit*, Sabie remains herself as distinguished and refined and gentle and beautiful as ever, and just goodness itself. Mother says I am mad about her. I wonder what *she* is? However, if I am, I don't care who knows it; I am proud of it; and if people only knew Sabie as intimately as I do, they wouldn't be much surprised, I think.'

He laid down the letter for a moment. He saw clearly the situation she described, despite the cunning with which she affected to be saying smooth things. And was this the predicament in which Sabina had placed herself? He could not believe it. Janie Wygram was only half-concealing the

violence of her prejudice. She took Fred Foster's cheerfulness—in itself an admirable quality—for indifference. Perhaps she was disappointed that these two betrothed people did not show her a little more of the romance of an engagement; *he* was not disappointed that Sabina should refuse to bill and coo for the edification of bystanders.

'I hope there will be no trouble in the future,' the letter went on, 'but I want you to understand that Sabie's father has behaved like a monster. They may say what they like about him in the papers; but certain I am that he has not the heart of a human being. He came here the day before yesterday (the first time he has honoured our house with his presence since Sabie came to live with us) and made a settlement of everything. That is to say, he never asked Sabie if she was still of the same mind; there was no quarrelling, or even remonstrance on his part—for he is far too selfish and cold and hard a man to take so much trouble about anybody; and then he told her what he meant to do. She is to have £100 for her wedding outfit; and afterwards he will allow her £150 a year to keep her from starvation, as he says; but he won't allow either her or her husband ever to come near his house. Sabie did not break down at all; she is too proud; indeed, the cruel thing is that Mr. Foster would not allow her to refuse the allowance altogether, which she wanted to do. Of course he took it in his chirrupy way. He says it will be all right; and that

after the marriage her father will relent. But she says he will do nothing of the kind; and she knows him better than Mr. Foster does. Fancy such meanness—to his eldest daughter; and that they should be for ever praising him in the papers for his public spirit and his benevolence! But what he gives to Sabie isn't printed in a list of subscriptions; I suppose that is it.

'There is one good thing; my dear one will have a true friend in Mr. Foster's mother. The old people came to town the other day; and Mrs. Foster was very, *very* nice and affectionate. Matters don't go smoothly between father and son, I imagine; but of course I wasn't allowed to hear too much; and perhaps now that he is to marry and settle down there will be greater harmony. Sabie will be the peacemaker; surely if they can withstand the sweetness of her disposition, they are made of sterner stuff than some people I know. I do wish she had some other kind of a father than that cruel old beast, Sir Anthony; just fancy the thousands and thousands he has; and he must needs cut down the girl's allowance by £150 just because he dislikes the man she is going to marry. Why, he might be proud to know that he has such a daughter; but there is none of *his* nature in Sabie; she must have got all her goodness and honour and generousness from her mother. If I were a writer in the papers, wouldn't I give it him! I'd show the public what a monster of meanness and hypocrisy he is; why, I believe he is glad that Sabie is going to

marry against his wishes, for it will save him £150 a year.

'Dear Mr. Lindsay, tell me if I bother you writing to you about Sabie. I can't talk to her as I used to. He has come between us; and she has other interests; and although she is as kind as ever, still this other future that is now coming near must engage all her attention. If only her heart had been placed elsewhere I should not have repined; no, I should have rejoiced; and I should have borne without a murmur a good deal of coldness or indifference on her part, if I saw that her affections were wholly centred on one worthy of them. Never mind; Sabie will always be dear Sabie to me, whoever claims her; and if there should be a time of trouble she won't want for one friend at least.

'The marriage is to be soon (because the chirrupy man thinks it's all a kind of gay pastime, I suppose), and I am to be the only bridesmaid. After that is over Sabie will have just as much of my friendship as she asks for; I am not going to intrude. Please forgive me for sending you so long a letter; I thought you might like to know how matters stand. And I hope everything will turn out well; but sometimes I am a little miserable—perhaps needlessly.—Yours sincerely, JANIE WYGRAM.

'*P.S.*—Would you mind sending Sabie a little message of congratulation; or is that asking too much?'

A message of congratulation! yes, and more. He put on his hat again and went out. The summer night was cool; it was pleasant to pass along through the light-hearted murmuring crowd. By this time the skies had darkened into a clear rich violet; the moon was shining with its fullest radiance; the sea broke in sharp ripples of gold along the shingle; the shadows of the people were black on the wan-gray pavements. What was he to do for Sabina? That, at least, was something more comforting to think of than the vague heart-sickness of renunciation.

And very wild some of these first projects were. He thought of settling his little patrimony in Gallowayshire on her, for her sole and exclusive use; of selling his studio and all its appurtenances, and then of 'taking the world for his pillow,' as the Gaelic stories say when the hero sets forth on his adventures. For he wished to get away from England somehow. And in thinking that he would be more content if the wide Atlantic were the barrier between him and Kensington High Street and Kensington Square, he was facing no foolish risk. His work was well known in art circles in America; several American artists were among his familiar friends; he was already a member of the Tile and Kinsman Clubs; the far Western land would in time come to be his home. And if he achieved fame there, might not Sabina occasionally hear of him? And if, after many years, he had amassed a little money, well, there was a vision before him of an elderly, white-haired man return-

ing to his native country, and perhaps finding a young Sabina there—a Sabina in all ways like her mother, but with her face bright with youth and hope, and her chestnut-brown hair as yet unstreaked with gray—who might be his companion on an afternoon stroll or so, and introduce him to the young man she favoured, and accept a little dowry from her mother's friend of former days? These were far-reaching dreams; but at least they were not very selfish.

In the meantime that forsaking of his native land had to be postponed for the most singular of all reasons—Sabina's marriage. Janie came to him one evening after he had returned to London, and diffidently and almost shamefacedly preferred her humble prayer. Sabie's relatives, she said, would have nothing to do with her; surely the few friends she had ought to stand by her. Lindsay looked at her for a second in his grave and thoughtful way.

'Do you think,' said he rather slowly,—'do you think Miss Zembra would like it?'

'Why don't you call her Sabie?' the girl cried piteously. 'Yes, yes, indeed she would! She asked me. Oh, I don't know whether she suspects there is any—any reason why you might refuse—how could I speak of that without saying too much——'

'And it is not to be spoken of any more,' said he gently. 'That is all past now. Yes, I will come to the wedding. I was thinking of going to America, but I will put that off.

And in the meantime, Miss Janie, I wish you would help me to decide on a present for her. There are two or three things I have been thinking of. There is a dessert service in old Worcester that my mother was proud of. It's in Scotland.'

'Oh, Mr. Lindsay, you wouldn't give away an heirloom like that!' Janie cried.

'I know where there is a very handsome set of things for the dinner-table, in Venetian glass, that ought to do,' he said absently. 'But I will hunt about, and perhaps get something more unusual.'

It was a fair autumn morning that saw Sabina wedded. Janie was the only bridesmaid. When, after the ceremony, the beautiful, smiling, fair-haired bride came walking down the aisle on the arm of her husband there was a little murmur of approval among the old women and girls who had wandered into the church. The smile that was on her face was one of greeting; for she had caught sight of Walter Lindsay (whom she had not seen for a long while), and she paused for a second to give him her hand. He murmured something about 'happiness,' and they passed on.

'Good-bye, Mrs. Wygram,' he said at the church door.

'But you are coming home with us!' the old lady said.

'No, I think not,' he answered.

'Oh, but Sabie particularly wished you should. We were counting up last night how many friends she had who

would take the trouble to come to the wedding—oh, indeed you must go back to the house. I thought Janie had arranged it with you!'

Well, he went, and found a very merry little party assembled in the familiar old faded drawing-room in Kensington Square. The happy bridegroom, very smartly dressed, and apparently quite recovered from his lingering lameness, was radiant, facetious, good-humoured to a degree; the bride (to use the faithful Janie's not very original phrase) looked more like an angel than ever. If she looked like an angel, she acted like a woman; for she singled out Walter Lindsay for the most especial and obvious kindness; and tore herself away from her sympathising feminine friends to talk to him, and to talk to him alone; and she was so anxious to know all about his future plans and projects.

'But you don't mean to remain in America?' she said, and her eyes were more frank and direct than his.

'Oh yes, I think so,' he answered.

'Why?' she asked in her straightforward way.

He hesitated for a moment, and then said with a laugh, 'Don't you know that picture-buying is a lost art in this country? I want to see if there is a market for my wares on the other side. That will take a long time.'

'You will come back to your friends,' she said, quietly.

When at last the moment arrived for her going away, the usual little crowd followed her to the front door, and there was the customary throwing of rice and old slippers. Janie

was standing on the steps alongside Walter Lindsay, and bravely endeavouring to restrain her tears. Just as the door of the brougham was snapped to, he heard her exclaim to herself, 'Sabie!'—and she put out her hand as if even now she would have entreated her friend to come back. It was a curious, involuntary little gesture; the stifled cry that accompanied it was almost a cry of anguish.

About a week after that Walter Lindsay sailed from Liverpool for New York.

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